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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

March 2010

*Devotional Literature:  
Kannada, Kashmiri, Assamese ...*

Vol. 115, No. 3



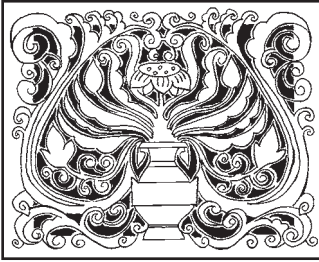
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Vol. 115, No. 3  
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राथ वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## *Poets of the Spirit*

March 2010  
Vol. 115, No. 3

Give up imagining that the skill of killing (the demon of) desire  
and meditating on the self are too costly to buy;  
He stands close by you! Do not look for him far away.  
The void was dissolved in the Void. (Lal Ded)

You physician of the soul, you have not seen the easiest remedy.  
You have done a thousand works,  
still you have not attained to the Lord  
and come to the world again, and once again.  
You spend your years in meditation and in penance  
in pilgrimage, in dwelling in Gaya and Kashi.  
You know the arguments of yoga, but the mind is clouded.  
Know you this:  
Except through supreme devotion there is no liberation. (Shankaradeva)

Make of my body, Lord, the pole;  
Make of my head, the gourd;  
Make of my nerves the wires, O Lord;  
And of my fingers the plectrum make;  
Intone your two-and-thirty notes;  
Thump on my heart to beat the time,  
O Kudalasangama Lord. (Basaveshwara)

I don't understand why,  
while all the worlds live within him  
and he lives within them by birthright,  
our lord of Katkarai—of gardens blowing with fragrance—  
should assault and devour  
this poor little soul of mine  
with his grace. (Nammalwar)

# THIS MONTH

Behind the apparent simplicity of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings lies a profound and distinct philosophy that is of great relevance to the contemporary religious environment. It is therefore meet that we take a fresh look at **Sri Ramakrishna's Religion** and try to grasp its diverse implications.



**In Some Spiritual Gems of Modern Kannada Literature** Dr Prabhu Shankara, former Director, Prasanga, Mysore University, introduces us to Kuvempu, Putina, and Bendre—three spiritual luminaries in the realm of modern Kannada.

Kashmiri literature has had a richly diverse history marked by an assimilative cosmopolitan spirit. This is brought out by Prof. Chaman Lal Sapru, Secretary, Jammu Kashmir Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, in **Spiritual and Cultural Ethos of the Kashmiri Literary Tradition**.



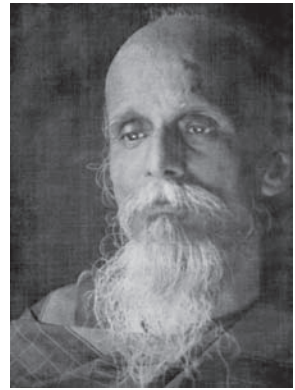
**Vaishnava Literary Tradition of Assam** is Dr Sanjib K Borkakoti's scholarly portrayal of a centuries-old tradition that continues to play a vital role in the life and works of the Assamese people. The

author is a writer of repute from Nagaon.

In the second instalment of **The Atman of Latin American Literature** Graciela Devita, a graduate in public relations, journalism, and communications, and a lawyer residing in Buenos Aires, provides us a

glimpse into the life, works, and spiritual evolution of the eminent Mexican poet Amado Nervo.

Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni remains a fairly obscure literary figure in Tamil Nadu. But his intense spiritual striving and earnest devotion to the literary muse demand greater attention. Dr Prema Nandakumar, Researcher and Literary Critic, Srirangam, reveals the muni's passions in **The Tapasvin as a Poet: Kavyakantha Vasishtha Ganapati Muni**.



Swami Tathagatananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society, New York, draws our attention to Sri Ramakrishna's great forbearance, transforming touch, and love for animals in the concluding portion of **Sri Ramakrishna and the Common People**.

We begin serializing Swami Bhaskareswarananda's notes on the **Vedanta-sara** of Sadananada Yogindra. The author, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, provides illuminating insights into practical spiritual living as he comments on the text.

Swami Chetanananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, concludes his presentation of **Mahendranath Gupta: The Mortal Institution and Naimisharanya** by highlighting the spiritual qualities of M as a teacher.



## EDITORIAL

# *Sri Ramakrishna's Religion*

**I**N HIS BOOK *SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S RELIGION* R K Dasgupta draws attention to the Memorandum of Association of the Ramakrishna Mission, which states the purpose of this organization: 'To impart and promote the study of the Vedanta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life.' He also notes the use of the terms 'the cult or religion of Sri Ramakrishna' and the 'universal principles taught by Sri Ramakrishna and exemplified by his life' in the Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Math as registered with the Registrar of Assurances, Calcutta, in 1970.

Dasgupta wonders what is *new* about Sri Ramakrishna's religion. Swami Vivekananda emphatically stated that Sri Ramakrishna had not come to add to the innumerable sects with which Hinduism was already teeming. Further, in his pamphlet on *Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna*, he wrote: 'Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna incarnated himself in India to demonstrate what the true religion of the Aryan race is; to show where amidst all its many divisions and offshoots, scattered over the land in the course of its immemorial history, lies the true unity of the Hindu religion, which by its overwhelming number of sects discordant to superficial view, quarrelling constantly with each other and abounding in customs divergent in every way, has constituted itself a misleading enigma for our countrymen and the butt of contempt for foreigners; and above all, to hold up before men, for their lasting welfare, as a living embodiment of the Sanatana Dharma, his own wonderful life into which he infused the universal spirit and character of this Dharma, so long cast into oblivion by the process of time.'

In his recent article in the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order, titled 'Katha-

write Sri Ramakrishner Mat Ki Vishishtadvaitavad' (Is Vishishtadvaitavada Sri Ramakrishna's Philosophy in the Kathamrita), Swami Prabhananda notes Mahendranath Gupta's observations on Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy: 'Sri Ramakrishna does not speak of this world as being illusory. He says, "[If you weigh only the flesh] you won't get the correct weight of the bel fruit." Not Mayavada. Vishishtadvaitavada. For he does not view the world and the jivas as illusory, as products of mental error. Ishvara is real; so also human beings are real, the world is real. Brahman is comprised of the world and the jivas.' Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples Swamis Premananda and Abhedananda are also known to have supported the view that Sri Ramakrishna was a proponent of Vishishtadvaita. Others cite his statements regarding Brahman and Shakti being inseparable, like fire and its burning power, as indicative of a Shaktadvaita stand.

Swami Turiyananda, in answer to a question regarding the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, says: 'From different standpoints, Gaudapada's doctrine of no creation, Shankara's doctrine of superimposition, Ramanuja's doctrine of transformation, and [Srikantha's] doctrine of Shivadvaita—each one of these is true. Again, apart from all these doctrines, God is beyond all human expression and beyond the cognition of the mind. The founders of all these philosophical systems practised austerities, and having received God's grace, they preached the various doctrines at his command. God is the subject from which these doctrines evolved, but he himself is beyond them. The philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna is to express this truth. That is what I think.' He further adds: 'Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy is: In whatever way and at any cost we must attain God. The Master said, "Tie the nondual knowledge in the corner of

your cloth and then do as you please.” This means: Once you attain God, it does not matter which doctrine your temperament bids you to uphold.’

Swami Saradananda, another monastic disciple, biographer, and theological interpreter of Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings, states that on concluding his sadhana Sri Ramakrishna realized that ‘the ideas of dualism, qualified nondualism, and nondualism—known as *dvaita*, *viśiṣṭādvaita*, and *advaita*—emerge spontaneously according to one’s spiritual growth. The Master said that they were not contradictory but depended on the stage of one’s spiritual growth.’ He also recorded some of the Master’s sayings in this regard: ‘Know that nonduality is the last word in realization. It is beyond the mind and speech, and a matter of experience.’ ‘Only the states up to qualified nondualism can be understood through the mind and intellect and expressed in words. There the Absolute and the Relative both are equally real. The Lord Himself, His name, and His abode—all are pure consciousness.’ ‘Duality is meant for ordinary human beings who are attached to sense objects. An excellent practice for them is to chant the Lord’s name loudly according to the *Narada Pancharatra*.’

The reputed philosopher Satis Chandra Chatterjee summed up this position in his *Classical Indian Philosophies: Their Synthesis in the Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘Sri Ramakrishna’s philosophy is Samanvayī or Synthetic Vedānta, since it reconciles the different schools of Vedānta. ... It is the philosophy of Neo-Advaita, neither Dvaita nor Viśiṣṭādvaita. It is not Dvaita or Dualism, because it holds that there is only one ultimate reality, Brahman, neither two nor more than two. It cannot also be characterized as Viśiṣṭādvaita or qualified monism like Rāmānuja’s. For, unlike Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita, it believes in the nirguṇa or indeterminate Brahman, which Rāmānuja does not. It is a philosophy of Advaita like Śaṅkara’s, but a new type of Advaita. While agreeing with the traditional Śaṅkarite Advaita in certain fundamental points, Ramakrishna’s Advaita goes beyond Śaṅkara’s in certain important respects. It is more positive than

Śaṅkara’s Advaita which is more negative. It is reconciled with Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Śakti-Advaita of Tantra and other types of Advaita, while Śaṅkara’s Advaita cannot, from the transcendental standpoint, be reconciled with these.’

It has been widely recorded that in Sri Ramakrishna’s presence the followers of various sects felt him to be an adept in their own path and a genuine advocate of their own views. This lived catholicity and universality remains a unique phenomenon in religious history. As Dasgupta reiterates: ‘He had a profound sense of the sacred and he discovered it in everything around him. Nothing was outside his Divine Universe. This is the root of his universalism in religion which his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, preached at home and abroad. All shades and nuances of man’s religious consciousness had their place in his spiritual life. It is this which gives his words the place of India’s *summa theologica*.’

In his lecture ‘My Master’ Swami Vivekananda underscored this fact: ‘The second idea that I learnt from my Master, and which is perhaps the most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. That one eternal religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. ... One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways.’ As a consequence of this insight Swami Vivekananda also saw the universal religion as the sum total of the existing world religions and also as every individual’s personal effort to access the universal spiritual consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna thus lived a universal religion that invites us to cast away dogmatic, exclusivist, and inclusivist attitudes, and even plunge deeper than the pluralist positions needed for harmonious existence in a multi-religious society and experience the genuine spiritual consciousness that makes religious life worthwhile. In responding wholeheartedly to it we shall only be deepening our spiritual lives.



# Some Spiritual Gems of Modern Kannada Literature

Dr Prabhu Shankara

**K**UPPALI VENKATAPPAGOWDA PUTTAPPA, popularly known as Kuvempu, Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, known by his last name Bendre, and Purohita Thirunarayana Narasimhachar, known by his abbreviated name Putina, are three distinguished poets of Karnataka whose voluminous outstanding literary creations have enriched modern Kannada literature. Not surprisingly, all three were spiritually inclined and their compositions exude an abundance of spirituality. Needless to say, the cultural ethos of Karnataka bears the indelible impression of their spiritual experiences.

## Kuvempu

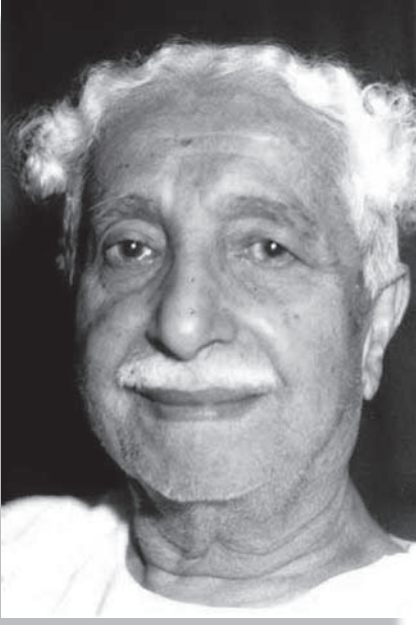
A voracious reader, Kuvempu got acquainted with the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda even as a student, when he was in his teens. The Ramakrishna Ashrama had just then been established in Mysore, in a place very near to the hotel where Puttappa was lodged. Swami Siddheswarananda, who was in charge of the newly founded monastery, developed great affection for the bright youngster Puttappa. The latter happened to fall ill at this time and be hospitalized. The swami persuaded him to stay in the ashrama and continue his college education. He even took Puttappa to Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, gave the boy spiritual instruction—initiation, as Puttappa would say. Later on, after imbibing the essentials of spirituality as lived by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, Puttappa wrote in an enchanting language the biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the latter

occupying pride of a place in its genre. The monks who succeeded Swami Siddheswarananda continued their benevolent patronage of Kuvempu, who had gradually acquired popularity as a writer. The ashrama became a safe haven for the youth. He firmly believed that Bhavatarini, the presiding deity of Dakshineswar, came all the way to the South just to pick up her dear child Kuvempu in her lap and protect him. One of his poems describes vividly the transformation that he, as a young poet, underwent at the touch of the Mother Divine:

Bhavatarini  
The personification of Consciousness,  
who dwells in the North,  
Came all the way to the South  
To lift up and protect this poet.

And the result was something extraordinary. Inspired by the life and teachings of the above mentioned spiritual giants, Kuvempu, even in his youth, wrote hundreds of poems of great literary and spiritual value. He even wrote an epic, *Sri Ramayana Darshanam*, running into twenty-five thousand lines. His sonnet on Swami Vivekananda has inspired a number of youngsters to serve the country and quite a few of them to embrace monastic life. It runs as follows:

Flower of philosophy, thou teacher great of  
cosmic creeds, spiritual giant,  
Oh God's Soldier, thou mighty-hearted saint,  
All hail to thee! For thee the deathless date  
Shall dazzling ever survive! No shriek nor plaint  
Thy brave devotee gives; he will be a giant  
Commanding earth and heaven; he ruleth Fate!  
Like a great dazzling meteor didst thou come  
Enlightening all; and flashed across the sky;



K V Puttappa,  
'Kuvempu'

Then wonder thrilled each slumbering heart,  
while dumb  
All stood adoring thee with eyes  
not ever winking.  
Again, and let again, Ascetic blest  
And Guide Divine, Thy orient rays blaze  
the West!

Later, Kuvempu wrote a biography of Swami Vivekananda, the like of which had never been written before, nor has been till now. It is rightly considered the best biography of Swami Vivekananda in Kannada and a masterpiece in its own right. It inspired thousands of people to read the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. At least a dozen youngsters, if not more, have embraced monastic life after reading Kuvempu's biography of Swami Vivekananda. Kuvempu has given a vivid picture of Swamiji, standing at the edge of the sub-continent, ready to jump into the Indian ocean to swim towards the rock on which he sat for three nights and three days, mourning the contemporary condition of India and contemplating on the means of its deliverance. The swami burst out, as if he were addressing the whole universe:

O Mother! O Aryan motherland pious! pardon  
the sins of your children, who have uglified your  
beautiful face. They have erred. They have cut you,

you an indivisible whole, into pieces. They forgot  
dharma and created isms. They mistook horrible  
superstition for dharma and sold you to aliens.  
They orphaned you. You were the beauty of the  
world, but they made you the very personifica-  
tion of ugliness. O Mother! Excuse them for their  
sins. Where is your wealth? Where is your scholar-  
ship? Where is your dharma, which was your very  
soul? By the devilry of the priests, the cruelty of  
casteism, the ego of the so-called superiors, the  
cowardice of the downtrodden, the selfishness of  
the scholars, and the foolishness of the unlettered  
your divine mansion has crumbled into a burial  
ground. Oh, ye dumb tears, can you now wash the  
feet of Mother India? Can you now wash the sins  
of your children? Can you, at least now, convert  
the burial ground into a heavenly mansion?

Several such passages with burning words  
ascribed by the poet Kuvempu to Swami Viveka-  
nanda, whose very being was burning with par-  
donable wrath at the atrocities committed by the  
so-called high and mighty, converted hundreds of  
young men and women into patriots who sacrificed  
their all for the cause of freedom. Quite a few mem-  
bers of the Ramakrishna Order have confided to me  
they were inspired by the passages of Kuvempu cited  
above. A number of Kuvempu's poems have become  
mantras chanted in several homes and monasteries.

Kuvempu's preface to the Kannada translation  
of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which he named  
*Vachana Veda*, is a classic. It has been translated into  
English by the present writer and has been read by  
numerous monastic members of the Ramakrishna  
Order, besides hundreds of lay devotees. It has been  
also translated into Bengali by Swami Shubhakara-  
nanda and published in the *Udbodhan*. Here are a  
few lines from the text:

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a veritable temple  
on one's palm, a veritable hermitage on one's palm,  
a veritable place of pilgrimage on one's palm. But  
unlike a temple or a place of pilgrimage, there is  
no chance of its getting polluted. Nor is there any  
chance of its getting dilapidated like the structure  
of a temple. The home that houses this *Gospel* will  
itself become a temple. The hand that holds it will

be holding the very lotus feet of the Lord. The tongue on which its letters roll will be savouring nectar itself. The *Gospel* is the repository of bliss; it is the ocean of peace; it is the manna of divine knowledge. It is the friend that stands by you in the hour of trial; it is the Guru that at the moment of overwhelming joy counsels humility and devotion and makes you feel that you are an offering at the Lord's feet. It is the torch that shows your way in darkness; it is the staff to lean upon while trudging on an uneven path. It is the polestar that guides you while you are lost in wilderness. It is the quintessence of Vedas and the Upanishads. After reading it even the most ordinary literate need not feel jealous of any scholar; nor does he feel inferior to any scholar of eminence. On the other hand, he feels that by the grace of God, none is more blessed than himself; he attains peace and fulfilment. He acquires the vastness of the sky, the heights of mountains, and the dignity of the ocean. Never before had God incarnated in such an approachable form, nor had the voice of the Lord shaped itself into a book that could be read and understood by the most ordinary of men and women.

Another unique contribution of Kuvempu to the spiritual literature of Kannada is his exquisite translation into Kannada of 'The Song of the Sannyasin' by Swami Vivekananda, capturing the very spirit and charm of the song. The translation is very forceful and enkindles the spirit of renunciation, which is the very soul of the song. It is sung in different tunes both in monastic and non-monastic circles. Whenever there is a chorus singing of bhajans, by monks or lay devotees of the Ramakrishna Order, this song is a must, and normally listeners press the singers to sing this song—so powerfully has it captivated the hearts of people.

As was mentioned earlier, Kuvempu's *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* is an epic running into twenty-five thousand lines. It is a recreation of Valmiki's Ramayana, but as viewed by a twentieth-century visionary, imbibing the religious, spiritual, and cultural revolutions that generations of humanity have brought into existence. Hence, Kuvempu is revered as a *rajarshi*, a sage who arouses sublime sentiments in his readers. Several poets of India have translated the original

Sanskrit Ramayana of Valmiki into their respective languages, either being faithful to it or making some changes to suit their times and culture. But Kuvempu's recreation of the Ramayana is completely different in the sense that it has passages that are tributes to the refreshingly great vision the poet had, emphasizing the superb quality of his creative genius. Let me cite one such passage to illustrate my statement.

Persons who are familiar with the story of the Ramayana are aware that the almighty God had taken human form as Rama and killed Ravana in a fierce battle. In his *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* Kuvempu has created a situation in which Hanuman, an invincible warrior, approaches his master in a shattered condition after being badly hurt by the enemy. Battered and bruised, he is in tears. Taking pity on the condition of his dear devotee, Rama shows his real form and addresses him thus:

Rise, brave hero! None but you have witnessed this (real form of mine).  
Not only to you, but to me also, this the divine element of my nature was concealed till now!  
I too am  
Taken by surprise. Realization bides its time,  
for all  
In this world of divine play  
You are my soul-mate, just watch the play  
Like the Upanishadic seer who says:  
'I knew not; but now I have seen!'

We can see in hundreds of his poems, in his several plays, and in his great epic what a great visionary Kuvempu was and how he has revealed his greatness as a seer-poet in line with those of the past.

### Putina

A great devotee of Krishna, Putina has written many poems in praise of his *ishta devata*, Chosen Deity. Besides, he has written a play titled *Gokula Nirgama* (Desertion of Gokula), which describes in a touching manner the young Krishna, the cynosure of all the villagers—specially of the women-folk—leaving Gokula for Mathura. The pangs of the dwellers of the village are heart-rending. Let me quote only the opening song of the play:



*P T Narasimhachar,  
'Putina'*

I bow down, I bow down,  
I bow down at the feet that incessantly  
traverse Vrindaban.  
His lovely face has merged with the clouds,  
And His smile with the tender lightning;  
His person has merged with all  
the directions around  
And the pearls of his necklace with stars above.  
I bow down at His feet  
Which are dancing on the floor of my heart.  
The peacock feather he wears resembles  
the moon in the blue sky,  
The white cloth he is donning is  
moonlight bright.  
In the silence of the night several tunes of  
flute rest on the breeze floating on  
the waves of the Yamuna.  
I bow down at His feet that are dancing  
in my mind,  
Those feet that are stepping on  
the soil of Vrindaban.  
At the fast beat of his feet  
My mind is becoming numb;  
But the heart is becoming soft.  
Joy has become a pool of my life;  
The waves of 'I' are disappearing fast.  
His feet are waving in my meditating mind,  
Like a lotus waving in the soft breeze.  
To those feet that tread the soil of Vrindaban  
do I bow, I bow again and again.

No wonder that this opera of Putina has conquered the hearts of at least two generations of lovers

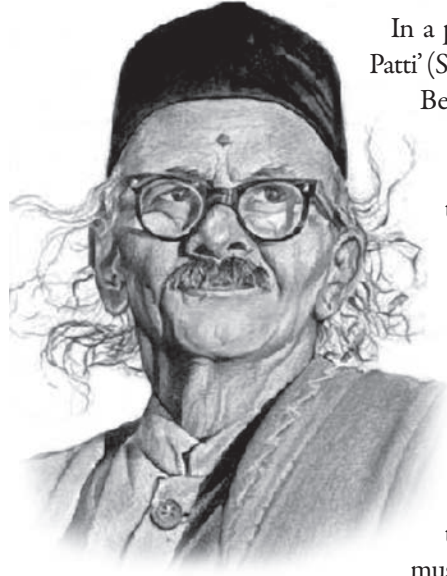
of literature. Putina has to his credit a very rare collection of meditative compositions—fifty-one in number, of ten lines each—titled *Male Degula* (Hill Temple), the like of which I have not come across in any language I am acquainted with. The translation I have made is of course not as effective as the original, but it conveys the spirit of the Kannada original.

O Hill Temple, you are my home,  
where I was born,  
That is the abode, where all the doubts  
come and rest  
In you after their tiring travel.  
You are the fruit of the struggles of ascetics.  
You are the stable centre of the series of  
births and deaths—  
You exhibit varying stances to viewers of  
different states of mind.  
You are the solid stable centre untouched by  
the varying stances like straight and curved,  
truth and false—  
For, you have been stabilized by the joy of yogis.  
Here I stand, humble at your doors,  
Words failed—but head bowed, in all humility.

These are only a few lines of more than ten thousand pages of writing of one of Kannada's greatest poets.

### **Bendre**

Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, popularly known as Da Ra Bendre, is another littérateur who, together with the previous two, has significantly enriched modern Kannada literature. Not only Kannada literature, he is a great name among Marathi speaking people as well, as he has also written many poems in Marathi. Very few poets have caught the intimate rhythmic beauty of the Kannada language as Bendre has done. He is termed by many discerning readers and reliable critics 'the (snake) charmer of the Kannada world'. Unfortunately, his achievements through the meaning and melody of the words he used cannot be adequately translated into English. However, the poet's spiritual world, which he successfully inherited from Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Purna Yoga, can to some extent be recreated.



Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre

In a poem titled 'Sama Patti' (Sudden Attainment) Bendre says that he has transcended the slavery of his mortal body and has become the *prana purna mantra*, the living mantra. A few lines from the poem can be quoted, but it should be remembered that the alliteration and music of his words cannot be translated:


Never am I the slave of this mortal coil;  
I am no more the paid slave of Prakriti;  
I have left behind the school of the inanimate;  
I have outgrown the magic world of the senses.  
The seer as I am, I have torn asunder  
The visible world of creation—  
And I stand as one who has crossed  
The vast visible universe.

### G S Shivarudrappa

One of the living legends of Karnataka, G S Shivarudrappa is the third Rashtrakavi, an honour conferred on him by the Karnataka Government. It appears to our mortal eyes a coincidence that two Rashtrakavis, national poets, are directly connected with the grand project of bringing *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into Kannada, christened by Kuvempu as *Vachana Veda*. The coincidence I refer to is that Kuvempu entrusted the overall revision of the Kannada translation of the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* to Shivarudrappa, who later on acquired fame as one of the greatest poets of Karnataka, and to me. Shivarudrappa was entrusted with the onerous task of translating all the Bengali poems of the *Gospel* into Kannada, and he has done a marvellous job—his translations are sung not only in the Ramakrishna ashramas but

in places beyond the radii of the monasteries. Here is a translation of Shivarudrappa's poem on Vivekananda.

Oh! He came  
Sri Guru Vivekananda  
From the Dhruva Mandala.  
He jumped into the roaring ocean,  
Slit the waves, swam, and pushed forward,  
He pierced his roots, deep into the rocks hard,  
Sprang high into the skies,  
And grew into a dome of light.  
Oh! He came,  
Sri Guru Vivekananda  
From the Dhruva Mandala.  
Oh, there was at Dakshinneswar  
The generating station of electric power!  
Vivekananda wove the wires from East to West  
And transmitted the flood of light  
From Colombo to Almora.  
His was the lightning chariot!  
Who was there that was not enlightened  
By the lightening Messiah?  
Oh! He came  
Sri Guru Vivekananda  
From the Dhruva Mandala.  
Physique of diamond, nerves of steel,  
eyes of lightning bright  
Voice of thunder,  
Words of torrential rains,  
Gait of rivers wide,  
And a heart, fruit of full-moon light,  
Poet, seer, yogi, and saint,  
The breeze of spring that moves  
around the world!

The poets and their compositions I have quoted above are only a few pearls collected from the vast ocean of modern Kannada poetry, which is a repository of spiritual and secular creations. 

G S Shivarudrappa  
being honoured as  
Rashtrakavi



# Spiritual and Cultural Ethos of the Kashmiri Literary Tradition

Prof. Chaman Lal Sapru

KASHMIR HAS BEEN A SEAT OF LEARNING from ancient times. Sanskrit literature has been enriched by Kashmiri scholars in several fields—philosophy, history, poetics, medicine, dramaturgy. In philosophy, when we think of Kashmir Shaivism, the polymath Abhinavagupta stands at the top. His commentaries on the *Ishvara-pratyabhijna* of Utpaladeva—*Ishvara-pratyabhijna-vimarshini* and the more detailed *Ishvara-pratyabhijna-vivriti-vimarshini*—are the most important texts on Kashmir Shaivism. Scholars are of the opinion that Utpaladeva's text would not have been fully intelligible and could not have attained so much popularity if Abhinavagupta had not explained the principles contained in it through his detailed commentary, *Vimarshini*. No other contemporary scholar could have done such a difficult task so efficiently.

Abhinavagupta has many other texts to his credit. Dr B N Kaul states: 'The most important original work of Abhinavagupta is *Tantraloka*. It contains the essence of all the scriptural works of monistic Shaivism. Esoteric doctrines of *trika yoga*, lying scattered in the Trika scriptures and expressed there through a highly mystic method, were collected, compiled, arranged in a proper order, systemized philosophically and expressed in a lucid style by Abhinavagupta in that voluminous work.' The *Tantraloka* deals philosophically with all the important rituals of the Trika system and its philosophic method, thus forming a fine theological study as well. It is, therefore, a unique work on the practical aspects of spiritual philosophy and throws light on many obscure mystic topics of Shaiva sadhana.

*Malini-vijaya-vartika*, dealing with the esoteric theoretical doctrines and practical aspects of Shaiva monism, as expressed mystically in the *Malini-vijayottara-tantra* of the Trika system, is another of Abhinavagupta's important works. He also revised Adishesa's *Paramarthasara*, a seminal text on monistic Shaivism especially useful for general readers.

Other prominent works on Kashmir Shaivism include *Spanda-shastra* of Bhatta Kallata and *Shivadrishti* of Somananda. Kashmir Shaivism has influenced poets of Kashmiri language also. These include not only Hindu poets like Lal Ded—Lalleshwari (1335–c.1385)—and Rupa Bhanwani (1621–1721), but also Muslim Sufi poets like Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani, alias Nand Rishi (1377–1440), Shams Faqir (1843–1914), and Ahad Zargar (1882–1963).

In Indian history the medieval period is important for a number of reasons. After the advent of Islam a process of acculturation started in India, inspiring thinkers, saints, and poets. An astonishing feature of this process was that though the saint poets belonged to different regions and wrote in different Indian languages, the ideas they expressed were remarkably similar. Their poetry had a tremendous influence on the entire age and this opened a new chapter of synthesis in Indian culture. Take Lal Ded and Kabir, for example; they were two different persons, living in two different regions, but there is an amazing degree of similarity in their ideas. This probably reflects the harmony that prevailed in society despite unstable political and religious conditions marked by oppression, tyranny, chaos, and turmoil.

Lalleshwari, popularly called Lal Ded by common Kashmiris, was born in a cultured Kashmiri brahmana family and had a disastrous married life in which she had to suffer great torture, much like lovelorn Mira. She was guided in her spiritual quest by her guru Siddha Mol, who was a Kashmiri Shaiva scholar—his teachings broadened Lalleshwari's mental horizon. With the decline of Hindu power, a state of despondency prevailed among the common people and a sense of insecurity gripped their minds. In Iran Taimur had unleashed an atmosphere of terror and tyranny, as a result of which religious missionaries known as Sayyids fled the country in hundreds. As many as five hundred of them—led by Sayyid Ali Hamadani, who has been given the name of Shah-i-Hamadani by Kashmiri Muslims—came to Kashmir. Sayyid Ali Hamadani played a prominent role in propagating Islam in Kashmir. It is said that he met Lalleshwari and was amazed by her spiritual powers.

Conflict between Hindu and Islamic cultures in the Kashmir Valley resulted in continuous political reverses for the Hindus, but at the social level there was a happy synthesis between Islam and Kashmir Shaivism. This prepared the ground for the development of Sufism. In Kashmir Sufis were addressed as *rishis* by the common people. Shaikh Nuruddin, also called Nand Rishi—known as Alamdar-i-Kashmir, the 'standard bearer of Kashmir'—was the founder of the Rishi Order. It may be recalled that his famous shrine was burnt down by the notorious Pakistani terrorist Mast Gul about a decade back. Sheikh Nuruddin's grave lies inside this shrine along with the graves of his twelve disciples, two of them being Hindu: Rupa Rishi and Lakhyman Rishi.

Nand Rishi was influenced by Lal Ded. He has expressed his reverence for her in the following words:

*Tas padman porachi lale  
Yitha tothyokh  
Tyuth var ditto mya divo*

Just as you bestowed your grace on Lalla of  
Padmanpur, grant me the same boon, my Lord.

### **Lal Ded and Kabir**

Some call Lal Ded the Mira of Kashmir. It is true that she stopped caring about social codes of honour and about family responsibilities and set out in the quest of her beloved, but there is one basic difference between her and Mira. Whereas Mira was attracted by the physical charms of Krishna and became a devotee of *saguna ishvara*, God with attributes, Lalleshwari was devoted to *nirguna brahman*, Brahman without attributes. Her was the path of knowledge as propounded in Vedanta and Shaiva philosophy. Mira appeals to us emotionally, while Lalleshwari impresses us at the intellectual level. If Lalleshwari is to be compared to any Hindi poet, it has to be Kabir.

Lal Ded and Kabir are two sides of the same coin. If Kabir is opposed to external rituals and superstitious beliefs, so is Lal Ded. Kabir asks both the Hindus and Muslims to adhere to the true way of worship. He cautions them about the futility of shouting Allah's name loudly to call the faithful to prayer, and explains that the all-knowing God is omnipresent and pervades every atom:

If God can be attained by worshipping stones  
Then why not worship the mountain.  
Better still is the millstone  
It provides flour for the whole world to eat!

Again:

They raised a mosque by laying together  
pebbles and stones  
And from its top the mullah cries hoarse  
to call the faithful to prayer  
As though God were deaf.

Lalleshwari too appears to be saying the same thing:

Shiva resides in every atom of the universe;  
Do not differentiate between  
a Hindu and a Muslim.  
If you are wise, then you should realize  
your true Self  
That alone is your acquaintance  
with the Lord.

Lalleshwari and Kabir are two representative voices of the same age. One is the voice of the Vitasta, the other of the Ganga. Both are immortal singers of the ageless unity of the Indian soul.

Lal Ded's most significant contribution lay in bringing the difficult Shaiva philosophy out from the cubicles of Sanskrit-knowing scholars into the wide open spaces of the Kashmiri-knowing common people. In the process of translating its highly evolved, and highly subtle, concepts and her personal mystic experiences into the language of the masses, she not only made these accessible to them but also enriched the Kashmiri language. The mystic's dilemma of how to communicate the uncommunicable personal vision seems to have been effortlessly resolved by her through the use of common idioms, images, and metaphors to which people could easily relate.

### Nand Rishi and Rupa Bhawani

Lal Ded is followed by Nand Rishi of Charar-i-Sharief in Badgam. His parents Sheikh Salaruddin and Sadar Moji were converts to Islam. Legend has it that as a baby Nand Rishi refused to suckle at his mother's breast. Just then Lal Ded made an appearance at Nand's home and spoke the following words to the baby:

*Zyana yeli na mandchhokh  
Chana kyazi mandchhokh  
Che ba che.*

When you did not shy away from being born  
(into this world)  
Why do you feel shy of sucking milk?  
Drink, Dear! Drink!

Hearing these words uttered by Lal Ded, the baby took to its mother's breast.

Lalleshwari's poetic compositions are known as *vakh* while Nand Rishi's compositions are known as *shrukhs*, shloka in Sanskrit. The *vakhs* of Lal Ded and *shrukhs* of Nand Rishi share several similarities. Following are a few selected *shrukhs* of Nand Rishi characterized by the exhortatory tone of bhakti poets. The first *shrukhs* reminds us to refrain from evil and perform virtuous deeds:

*Angan nad karan huna  
Mye kun bayo tohya shunitav  
Yemya yi vov tamya ti lun  
Hun chhu wanan vav ba vav.*

The dog is barking in the courtyard  
'O! Brothers listen to my call,  
What one sows (here) reaps  
(in the world hereafter).'  
As you sow so shall you reap.

A believer in the oneness of God, Nand Rishi explains:

*Kuniray bozakh kuni no rozakh  
Amy kuniran kotah dyut jalav.  
Aqal ta fikir tor kot sozakh  
Kamya mali chyath hyok su daryav.*

If you practise oneness (in life), you will lose  
your individuality.  
Behold how the one shines resplendently!  
Neither your intellect nor mind  
can comprehend this,  
My dear, who can drink that deep stream  
(of knowledge).<sup>1</sup>

In some *shrukhs* the poet is engaged in self introspection:

*Kyah kara, kyah kara, hani hani dih gom  
Pap gam toarya ta kati vobra.  
Myuth modur khyay khyay veh khyom  
Dah gom panas ta kyah kara.*

What am I to do, what am I to do,  
my body has wasted away by inches,  
My sins have piled up;  
how can I grow spiritually?  
I overate sweet dishes  
that turned poisonous for me,  
No one else but myself is to be blamed  
for my bad plight.

Influenced by Kashmir Shaivism, the Kashmiri Sufis practised a mixture of Islamic and Shaiva philosophy. The native Sufis were called *rishis* by common Kashmiris as they were distinct from the Muslim Sufis who had come from Iran. We have records of dozens of rishis in Kashmir, and their *ziarats*, shrines, still exist at different places. The Rishi cult of Kashmir correctly interpreted the Islamic tenets. They

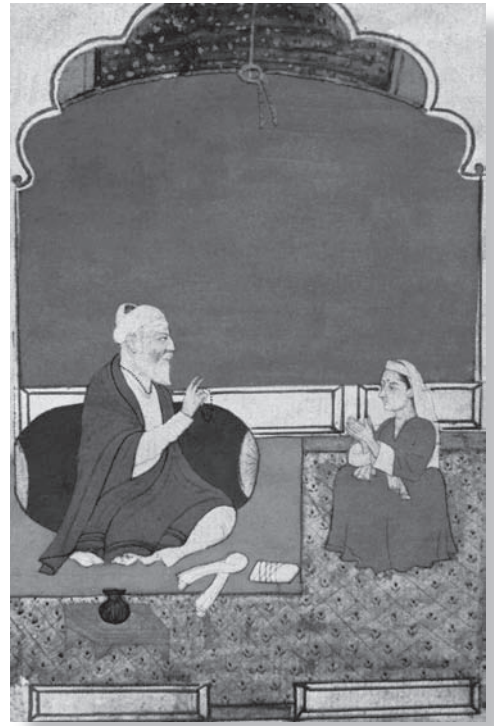
gave a healing touch of humanistic values when the clouds of disruption were bent on besmearing the harmonious stand of the Indian social order.

According to Professor K N Dhar, a veteran scholar of the Kashmiri heritage, after going through the entire gamut of Rishi literature, we can distinctly perceive the following two stages in their exercise of self-education: (i) the urge to proceed from the finite to the infinite, from immanence to transcendence; and (ii) the practice of a self-discipline that led to this realized state of the mind. The Rishi cult has also derived ample sustenance from the five pillars of spiritual ascendance as enunciated by Islam: *taqwa*, piety; *ikhlas*, doing a good deed for the sake of God; *sabr*, steadfastness, patience, fortitude; *ta-wakul*, trust in God; and *shukur*, sense of gratitude to God. The Rishis have unfolded their experiences around these guidelines ushering in a silent revolution in the mental fibre of Kashmiris.

Rupa Bhawani, also remembered as Alakheshwari by her devotees, is another important name amongst bhakta poets of medieval times in Kashmir. She influenced both Hindu and Muslims of her time. Her sayings, like those of Lalleshwari, are also known as *vakhs*.

A muslim saint Shah Sadiq Qalandar lived across the river Sindhu near Manigam village. He saw Rupa Bhawani floating down on a mat. He asked her name, to which she replied, 'Rupa.' Now *rupa* also means silver. So Sadiq Qalandar said, 'Rupa! If you come to our side—that is, become a convert to Islam—you will become Soan, gold.' Rupa replied, 'Qalandar! If you come to our side—become a Hindu at heart—you will become Mokta, pearl.' *Mukta*, of course, also means 'the liberated.' On another occasion, when Shah Qalandar saw Rupa Bhawani dressed in a garment dyed in crimson, he asked what colour her garment was. She replied: '*Zag, su rath ta ma zeth.*' This again carries a two-fold meaning. *Zag* means both (i) the dye produced from vitriol, safflower, or madder, and (ii) the warning: 'Awaken.' '*Su rath ta ma zeth*; hold Him fast and extend not.' Rupa Bhawani had Qalandar mesmerized by her spiritual attainments and he revered her along with his followers.

Pandit  
Madhav  
Joo Dhar  
and  
daughter  
Rupa  
Bhawani



### Shams Faqir

This is an important name among Kashmiri Sufi poets. Born in 1843, Shams Faqir belonged to the Qadiri order of Sufis. Ninety-six of his poems have been included in an anthology on Kashmiri Sufi poetry published by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages. These poems prove him a Sufi poet of a high order. These include *manqabat* poems in praise of Prophet Muhammad. Most of his poems are influenced by Kashmir Shaivism. A famous one is 'Zan Milnav Bhagvanas Sutyā' (Realize God):

*Zanwani zan kar pranas gyanas  
Zan milnav bhagvanas sutyā.  
Puzayi karanya gayi manz karam wanas  
Dharam shastar nis butkhanas.*

O you enlightened one,  
Recognize the vital air and attain gnosis.  
To realize God  
Real worship is performed  
In life's workshop itself:  
What the holy scriptures truly mean by  
'the house of idols.'

*Shams faqir nami parkanthas  
Tschay wuchhta ma chhay row siriyas.  
Tschay O'bur la'gith khatsh asmanas  
Zan milnav bhagvanas sutya.*

O you 'learned' Shams,  
The sun doesn't have a shadow;  
Lalla ascended to heaven like a cloud.  
Realize God (as she did).<sup>2</sup>

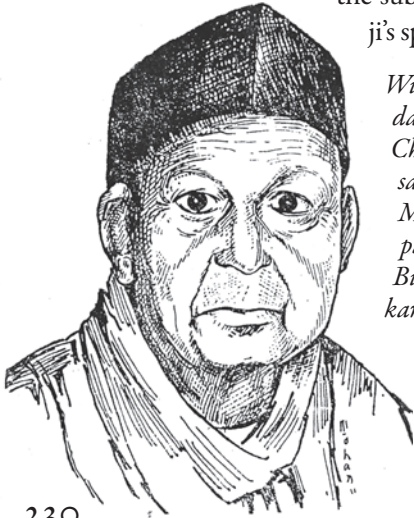
### **Pandit Zinda Kaul 'Masterji' (1884–1966)**

Among modern Kashmiri littérateurs, Pandit Zinda Kaul 'Masterji' is a leading name. He is not merely revered by his admirers as an outstanding teacher, scholar, and distinguished poet, but also as a saint. He was the first Kashmiri littérateur to receive the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award from the government of India. His poem 'Yor Amut Gindne' (He Has Come Here to Amuse Himself) is both doctrinal and philosophical, and reveals the impact of Vedantic and Shaiva philosophy on his work. In this poem Masterji says:

The king has of his own will  
Left the country of the soul  
And descended to this planet  
To amuse himself  
As the peacock delights in dance.

Masterji was an embodiment of love. The very first poem of his collection *Sumran* sums up the recurring theme of love, which appears to have become the substance of Masterji's spiritual being:

*Wuchhim gat chanya  
daivagat  
Che vina dayi no  
saray lolo.  
Mya andar kar  
panun mandar  
Bu tseya puza  
karay lolo.*



**Pandit Zinda Kaul  
'Masterji'**

Marvellous have I found; your power, O Love  
I cannot adore any god but you.  
Make my being your temple, O Love  
Thus may I worship you, within me.

Universal love raises man above the trivialities of life. The spiritual and cultural ethos of Kashmiri literature can be summed up in the message of love underlined from ancient to modern times by the eminent poets of Sanskrit and Kashmiri. In the words of the great poet Ghulam Ahmad 'Mehjur':

*Poz muhabbat bagraviv panvany  
Heund chhu shaker dodh chhu Muslim saf saf  
Doad ta shakar milanaviv panvany  
Poz muhabbat bagraviv panvany.*

Let us get interwoven in the bonds of true love.  
The Hindus are sweet sugar  
And the Muslim are the milk.  
Mix these for everlasting harmony and love.

Masterji adds:

*Yacch pacch ma har byakha heth yury vati kanccha  
Tas chha kami nishanan bary bary khazana vesiye.  
Dolan kohan vanan manz,  
sholan chhu gulshanan manz  
Zotan chhi tarkan manz kaetyah nishana vesiye.*

Dear friend, pray do not lose hope and faith;  
No wonder if someone comes  
To you with another love token.  
He has no dearth of tokens; His treasures are full.  
His tokens are lying ungathered  
in hills and woods  
Or brightly blooming in flower beds,  
or scintillating among the stars.

*Dil phutimaten chhu toshan,  
yechh gari maten chhu roshan  
Gachh vaeri maten sudaman,  
prichh gayibana vesiye.  
Andip pakhy tati chhu asan,  
bodbror surdasan,  
Bozan chhu may laegith,  
loliky tarrana vesiye.*

He loves the humble repentant though he  
pretends to be angry with those who are  
sophisticated.

If you don't believe me, go and ask aside His  
popular devotees like Sudama who had won  
this love.

He, the all knowing innocent child, is never far  
from saints like Surdas, and listens quietly to  
their devotional songs.

### **Paramanand (1794–1879)**

A towering bhakta poet, Paramanand was a great devotee of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. He was born at Sirkanilgund (Anantnag) village near the famous pilgrim centre Mattan or Martand, which falls on the way to the Amarnath cave shrine. He composed three long devotional narrative poems—*Shiv-lagan*, *Radha-swayamvar*, and *Sudama-charit*—besides a large number of bhajans and *lilas*, litanies. These litanies were addressed to Ganesha, Parvati, Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, and Krishna.

One of his remarkable devotional poems is 'Lila-e-Zamindari', wherein he says that the seeds of contentment will blossom into the fruits of ecstasy. This poem, which provides an intimate picture of rural Kashmir, aims at preparing the sadhakas for the purification of their soul necessary for the attainment of jnana. The introductory stanza reads thus: 'Reinforce your field of action with the spirit of duty and devotion; the seeds of contentment will then grow to bear the fruit of eternal Bliss. Harness the oxen of twin breath to plough the field day and night; lash them on to work hard with the *kumbhaka* whip. Arise, awake, and endeavour to see that no patch remains unploughed.' The entire poem is replete with symbols like 'the yoke of love', 'block of patience', 'moisture of malice', 'wet sods of contemplation', 'water of tapas', 'sickle of renunciation', 'logs of meditation', and 'your own karma is the store of your tale, *prarabdha*'.

This poem had become very popular on account of the spiritual ideas it expressed in the familiar language of the agricultural processes. It reached the ears of the fakir Wahab Sahib. When Paramanand visited him along with his friend Dharam Chand Patwari, the fakir playfully complained that Paramanand had written all his poems in Sanskritized

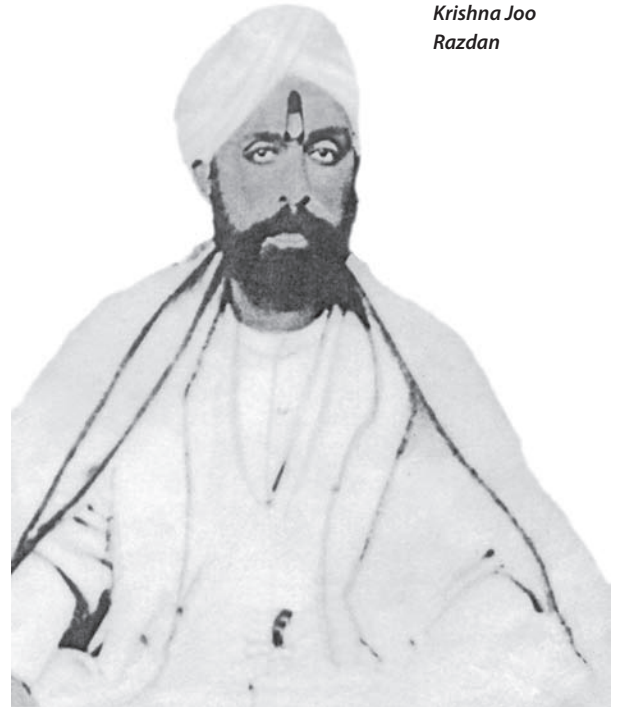
Kashmiri, intelligible only to Pandits and nothing for the benefit of Muslim admirers like him. Upon this Paramanand dictated on the spot a short poem avoiding Sanskrit words though retaining the form of his original agricultural language. The poem begins thus: '*Panchh tre baglis karardadas vadasz zyada na kam*'; in the contract of division (of produce) in the ratio of five parts to three, the agreement has to be fulfilled exactly—neither more nor less can be accepted.'

### **Krishna Joo Razdan (1850–1925)**

Krishna Joo Razdan, a very popular bhakta poet, wrote devotional poems in the *lila* form. His most impressive work is *Shiv Lagan*. He was meticulous in his choice of words. A grihastha saint par excellence, he would say: '*Basti manz vavasuy roz*'; live in the household as a forest-dweller.' One of his popular *lilas* in praise of Sri Krishna depicts the Ras Lila as follows:

*Nand lal av gindne ras  
Ara karivey aray ...*

Krishna Joo  
Razdan



Come and join the ring  
 Nand Lal is to perform the *rasa* dance  
 O gopis! Join the ring  
 The fire of love consumed the wild rose,  
 It took recourse to the woods  
 And sauntered from brook to brook  
     in search of the beloved  
 Join the ring ...  
 Nothing from this world will go with us,  
 Let us give every penny in alms  
 Only God's name can save us,  
 Come and join the ring.  
 O Krishna Joo! Shake hands with  
 The Lord from your very childhood.  
 Your youth is a seven-day wonder.  
 Come and join the ring.<sup>3</sup>

### Ahad Zargar

He was the shining stalwart to continue traditional Sufi poetry after centuries-old mystics like Lal Ded and Nand Rishi. The unique blend of romanticism, humanism enciphered for the attainment of divine with amazing rhetoric makes Zargar a distinguished visionary and philosopher. Zargar always articulated and emphasized the need of peace and was an inciter of love and harmony even in the most turbulent times in Kashmir. He was a versatile and gifted poet with a unique Sufi insight and would hardly come out of his Sufi realm. Zargar is all about the pursuit of knowledge and the quest for divine.<sup>4</sup>

Each year a Sufi festival called 'Sham-e-Zargar' is observed at his tomb as a tribute to this literary legend of Kashmir. His mystic verses have benumbed souls and made them experience exultation in the spiritual path to the inner Self. Here is a piece of his mystic verses translated by Ibn Mushtaq Shah:

*Fakiri*, the way of the renunciant

The treasure of knowledge for the learned  
 The crown for those who seek the truth  
 The reward for those who are righteous  
 The house of God, the only way.

*Fakiri*

The guide to the secret treasure  
 The leader to the divine court of Love  
 The king of the nib and the slate  
 The house of God, the only way.

*Fakiri*

Ahad Zargar lays down at your door  
 You appear gloriously within and without  
 You dwell in every nook and cranny within me  
 The house of God, the only way.

*Astagfirullah al-azeem*: I seek forgiveness  
 from the Great Allah.

### Two Contemporary Poets

Fazil Kashmiri (b. 1916) is a prominent Kashmiri poet who has written Nat poems in praise of Prophet Muhammad and also translated the Japuji Sahib composed by Guru Nanak from the original Punjabi. He has also published, under the title *Krishna Lila*, a collection of *lilas* in Kashmiri in praise of Sri Krishna. The book has forewords by eminent Kashmiri personalities. For his love of Krishna, he is called in literary circles the 'Raskhan of Kashmir'. Ghulam Rasool Santosh (1929–97) was a famous Tantra artist by profession. A devotee of Mata Sarika, the presiding deity of Srinagar city, he wrote many devotional poems to the Divine Mother. He writes:

*Netran bundya moj ratan dip zalay*  
*Yechhi pachhi alway zuv tai jan.*

O Divine Mother, I shall perform your Arati by lighting the two lamps of my eyes and offer you my life. (Kindly bless me and remove the darkness of my ignorance).

These are but a few writers that have contributed to a living tradition continuing into current times.



### Notes and References

1. This and the following verse are translated by Dr A N Dhar.
2. Translated by Dr A N Dhar.
3. Translated by T N Kaul.
4. <<http://thekashmirweave.wordpress.com/>> accessed 30 December 2009.

# Vaishnava Literary Tradition of Assam

Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti

AS THE MAJORITY OF ASSAMESE PEOPLE are followers of the Vaishnava faith, Assam has a rich Vaishnava tradition which has influenced Assamese literary activity to a great extent. The history of this literature goes back to the sixth century, when Purushottama Gajapati, an emperor of the Jitiri dynasty, authored a book named *Dipika Sanda*. Thus, Puroshottama Gajapati can be called the pioneer of Vaishnava literature in Assam. Ratnapura was the capital of his empire Kamarupa, the ancient name of Assam. He wrote this book by taking ingredients from such varied Sanskrit treatises as *Hangsakaki* (Pelican's Voice) and *Jamala Sambhita* (Treatise of Jamala). He criticized decadent Tantric rituals in this book, but as he was not a theoretician there was not much theoretical analysis in the work. He predicted the dominance of the unrighteous in Bharatavarsha:

*Haibeka adharmmakari loka bharatara;  
Tini dishe tini raja haibe anantara.*

The people of Bharata will become unrighteous. After that there will be three empires in three directions.

Madhava Kandali was the most prominent Assamese Vaishnava litterateur of the fourteenth century. The intervening period since Puroshottama Gajapati had not seen much Vaishnava writing, because of the strong influence of Buddhism in this region. Madhava Kandali translated the Ramayana into Assamese in five cantos; this was one of the first translations of the Ramayana into a modern Indian language. He carried out the translation with faithfulness to the original, but made it concise in places. Moreover, he gave a local flavour to the narrative. He was a great devotee of Rama. He wrote:

*Sapone sachite manyi jnane kaya bakya mane;  
Aharnishe chinto rama rama.*

I think about Rama by day and by night through body, speech, and mind, both in the dream and wakeful state.

Harivara Vipra was a fifteenth-century Vaishnava poet. He authored several *kavyas*, poetic works, based on the 'Ashvamedha Parva' of the *Jaiminiya Mahabharata*. These included *Lava-Kushar Yuddha* (The War of Lava and Kusha), *Babhruvahanar Yuddha* (Babhruvahana's War), and *Tamradhvajar Yuddha* (Tamradhvaja's War). He used his *kavyas* to preach the glory, prowess, and excellence of Sri Krishna—glorifying the worship of Vasudeva Krishna was an important purpose of the 'Ashvamedha Parva' too. He remained loyal to the original, but used Assamese proverbs and portrayed a local picture in his renderings. The poet Hema Saraswati also belonged to the fifteenth century. He authored several small *kavyas* like *Prahlada Charita* (The Personality of Prahlada), which narrates how the tyrant king Hiranyakashipu was killed by Sri Narasimha.

## Srimanata Shankara Deva

The real giant of Assamese Vaishnava literature, however, is Mahapurusha Srimanta Shankaradeva (1449–1568). He founded the Eka-sharana Nama Dharma, 'the religion of complete surrender to the One', a new order that preached devotion to a single God, Sri Krishna. For this purpose song, dance, and drama were used as tools by the saint. Srimanta Shankaradeva was not only a religious preceptor but also a social reformer who Sanskritized the ethnic groups of the volatile north-eastern regions of India and assimilated them in the national mainstream. He was a great spiritual leader who rescued the people of the

Brahmaputra valley from such regressive practices as human sacrifice. His everlasting impact is to be seen to be believed. His writings continue to inspire people even today. They are not only used as devotional material but also as literary models. In his social reform and preaching activities he was assisted by his foremost disciple Madhavadeva.

Srimanta Shankaradeva authored ten plays: *Chihna Yatra* (Play of Signs), *Patni Prasada* (Grace of the Wives), *Kaliya Damana* (The Suppression of Kaliya), *Keli Gopala* (The Sport of Gopala), *Rukmini Harana* (The Stealing of Rukmini), *Parijat Harana* (The Stealing of Parijat), *Janma Yatra* (Play of Birth), *Gopi Uddhava Sambada* (Conversation between the Gopis and Uddhava), *Kangsa Badha* (The Killing of Kamsa), and *Sri Rama Vijaya* (The Victory of Rama). The first of these, *Chihna Yatra*, was enacted as early as 1468. Srimanta Shankaradeva helped the drama movement grow all over India. He was among the first playwrights in any modern Indian language. His *ankiya-nats*, one-act plays, were enacted all over North India. He used the Brajabuli form of Assamese language in his plays as well as in his songs known as *bar-gits*, noble songs. As a result, his plays and *bar-gits* had a wide audience over North India. The play *Kaliya Damana* is said to have had such impact in Bengal that this period came to be known as the Kaliya Damana Yatra era. It is also believed that the word *yatra* became popular in Bengali language after the staging of the saint's plays. Playwrights like Govinda and Umapati of Mithila, the most developed intellectual centre of medieval India, are reported to have acknowledged the saint's contribution in moulding their style. Maithili plays resembled the *ankiya-nats*.

Srimanta Shankaradeva brought about many innovations in his plays. It was he who introduced the *shanta-rasa*, serene mood, for the first time in his plays. Bharata's *Natya-shastra* does not recognize this mood, which was first suggested by scholars like Ananadavardhana (820–90) and Abhinavagupta (fl. 1015). Srimanta Shankaradeva departed from the typical norms laid down by Bharata for classical plays. For instance, he incorporated scenes

showing eating, marriage, war, and killing in his plays; such scenes were strictly forbidden in Sanskrit drama. His plays *Patni Prasada*, *Keli Gopala*, *Rukmini Harana*, and *Sri Rama Vijaya* clearly differed from Sanskrit plays on this count. The *sutradhara*, compère, of Srimanta Shankaradeva's plays is also very different from those in Sanskrit plays. Shankaradeva's *sutradhara* remains in the acting arena from the beginning till the end, whereas the *sutradhara* in Sanskrit drama departed from the stage soon after introducing the topic of the play. Shankaradeva's *sutradhara* even participates in the acting, singing, and playing of instruments like the drum. The *sutradhara* also keeps explaining the story as well as its spiritual import from time to time. Srimanta Shankaradeva used the medium of play for his preaching work. This was a great innovation.

Srimanta Shankaradeva authored several *kavyas* too: *Harishchandra Upakhya* (The Story of Harishchandra), *Rukmini Harana*, *Kurukshe*, *Ajamila Upakhya* (The Story of Ajamila). He highlighted the glory of Sri Krishna and the eventual victory of Krishna-devotees in all these works. The importance of such virtues as truth and honesty were also highlighted. Though he took the ingredients of these *kavyas* from various Sanskrit scriptures, his compositions were original in many respects. He created new characters too. Srimanta Shankaradeva preached that there was only one God, who controlled the entire Creation and resided within all sentient and insentient beings. He preached devotion to the one and only God, Sri Krishna or Vishnu. He also suggested that devotion could be within one's heart and did not require any religious paraphernalia. Realization of God was an internal affair, not external; so the external worship of icons was redundant. He spoke of universal love for all beings as God resides within all.

Srimanta Shankaradeva's philosophy was based on the doctrine of complete self-surrender to God as taught by Sri Krishna himself in the Bhagavad-gita. He stressed that devotees should cultivate the attitude of a loyal servant towards God. Humility was an imperative for them, he pointed out. He

would take great pains to teach these values and to help the disciples internalize them. Once his aged disciple Sarvajaya urinated inadvertently inside the Kirtanghar, prayer room, during prayers. Totally engrossed in prayer, Sarvajaya was in an ecstatic mood and at that moment had no body consciousness at all. Srimanta Shankaradeva himself washed him and changed his clothes.

Srimanta Shankaradeva preached a unique philosophy. Though a proponent of the devotional path, he was neither a dualist nor a qualified monist. He believed in one God, but was not a monist either. While Shankaracharya felt that the world was unreal, Srimanta Shankaradeva said that the world was an attribute of the supreme entity, Brahman. Again, while Ramanujacharya considered the world to be an organic part of Brahman, Srimanta Shankaradeva said that the world was identical with Brahman in its intrinsic reality and only appeared to be a separate entity to the non-enlightened. It was a creation and, at the same time, an attribute of Brahman.

Srimanta Shankaradeva's teachings combined the Upanishadic philosophy of enlightenment through knowledge of the Self with pure devotion to the Supreme God as preached in the Bhagavata. He made a fine blend of the two. His teachings cannot be ascribed to any particular branch of philosophy; they constitute a completely separate branch. His view of life was integral, like Sri Aurobindo's in recent times. He carried the entire spectrum of Hinduism in his teachings and presented them so logically that they came to form a whole new school, which the present author has termed 'Vivartanavada'.

Srimanta Shankaradeva's ideology was structured pyramidally, with the Bhagavata at the bottom and the Gita at the top. The intermediate zone contained scope for different attitudinal inclinations. This was a marvellous presentation of the entire range of human spiritual aptitudes: a devotee could evolve through his system from the gross to the subtle, from the mundane to the spiritual, from manhood to godhood. Srimanta Shankaradeva described the twenty-four incarnations of God in the very first chapter of his *Kirtana-ghosha*, which symbolized



*Kirtanghar in Bardowa Than*

human evolution. His religious order was named Eka-sharana Nama Dharma because the concept of self-surrender and the chanting of God's name constituted the main mode of sadhana. The salient points in Srimanta Shankaradeva's extensive writings that have philosophical bearings are as follows:

- (i) Brahman is the supreme Truth.
- (ii) Brahman and Ishvara, God, are the same.
- (iii) Brahman or Ishvara is in every being.
- (iv) Ishvara and his Creation are not different.
- (v) Jiva, creature, is a component of God. The former constitutes the body of the latter.
- (vi) Creation is temporary but not exactly unreal, as it is a projection of God. So it cannot be ignored.
- (vii) Maya is an act of God and its influence can be avoided by the grace of God.
- (viii) One becomes godly as one realizes the identity of God and the five elements.

Srimanta Shankaradeva thus evolved a unique philosophy which attempted a resolution of conflict between different schools of thought in Indian philosophy. Creation was not non-substantive for him, as it was for Shankaracharya. Srimanta Shankaradeva saw God in his Creation. At the same time, he said that there was only one ultimate entity: Brahman. These subtle differences made his philosophy practical.

Srimanta Shankaradeva was a great humanitarian. His writings are addressed to the entire humanity, not just the population of a region like Assam or even Bharatavarsha. He called upon everybody to worship Sri Hari. It was this love for humanity that propelled him to oppose all form of killing. In his writings he warned repeatedly that one should

not sacrifice any creature, for that creature in turn would torture the sacrificer in the other world. He thus recognized the equality of all creatures, not merely human beings. This clarion call of the saint was necessitated by the grave social situation prevailing in the Brahmaputra valley in those times—even human beings were sacrificed before deities by Tantrics who called the shots in society.

Education in Shankaradeva's time was a privilege available to only a limited few belonging to the upper echelons of society. The enlightened and socially conscious disciples of Srimanta Shankaradeva constituted a microscopic minority in this vast sea of illiteracy. Nevertheless, Srimanta Shankaradeva and his followers engaged themselves in the work of propagating knowledge and wisdom in their own way. He authored many songs, plays, prayers, and philosophical writings. These constituted a major portion of the course material prescribed in the then residential schools. The teachers of those schools mainly taught religious scriptures like the Vedas, Puranas, Gita, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. There wasn't much of secular teaching. The essence of that curriculum was very much present in the writings of Srimanta Shankaradeva. So, when his plays were enacted, his songs sung, and his hymns chanted, people received the very knowledge which they would receive in the residential schools. But there was something more in the teachings of Srimanta Shankaradeva that was missing from the curriculum of those residential schools: value education, which remains a crucial ingredient in modern education too.

Thus Srimanta Shankaradeva was not only a religious leader but also an educationist in his own way. He helped people acquire knowledge of the scriptures as well as of human behaviour. There were even elements of social science—analysis of social conditions—in his writings, albeit in a primitive form. His teachings were full of advice on an ideal lifestyle. He exhorted people to give up aggressiveness and shun evil and cautioned against pride. Ethics constituted the main thrust of his teaching. As a teacher of the entire cross section of society he can be seen as a pioneer in adult education. His

plays, discourses, and prayer meetings were always full of people from all age groups. His main message was that there was no intrinsic difference between humans, all being creations of the same God.

Srimanta Shankaradeva was also a pioneer in the movement for equal rights for women. He emphatically said that women ought to be educated at a time when the majority of the male population itself was uneducated. Thus, he was a pioneer of women's liberation. He even departed from the original writing of Valmiki in his rendering of the Ramayana 'Uttarakanda' in order to protest the injustice meted out to Sita by Sri Rama.

Srimanta Shankaradeva's progressive thinking is evident from his writings. A revolt against the traditionalists was brewing in his maiden book *Harishchandra Upakhyana* itself. The people who torture women are strongly condemned therein:

*Strika durbala kare konano niskhale;  
Jvalanta bahnika bandhe bastrara anchale.*

What mean person weakens women? He wraps the burning fire by the end of a sheet of cloth.<sup>1</sup>

*Keli koutuhale asilihi mora pasha;  
Krirata karilo toka jiba paribasa.  
Yena bhaila rangara samaya mana rosha;  
Ehi tota sadho tata nadharibi dosha.*

You were beside me in enjoyment. Please forgive me for whatever derisive comments I made in fun that upset you (438).

This description of King Harishchandra apologizing to his wife Shaibya is a rudimentary recognition of women's rights as well as women's self-respect. Srimanta Shankaradeva also considered women as partners of men in intellectual pursuits. King Harishchandra tells Shaibya:

*Karmara samayata toka mantri buli lekhi;  
Rangara belata yena toi pranasakhi.*

You were my bosom friend during the time of enjoyment. But I treat you like my minister during work (436).

(To be concluded)

## Reference

1. *Harishchandra Upakhyana*, verse 75.

# The Atman of Latin American Literature – II

Graciela Devita

‘ALMA’ IS THE SPANISH WORD FOR ‘ATMAN’, and both sound so similar! The manner in which the sound of words combine is one of the basic elements of high poetry—poetry, the expression of the soul that blends literature with music. What pushes the ideas of a poem to the innermost depths of our souls is its music. When one reads the concluding lines of Swami Vivekananda’s poem ‘Kali’:

Who dares misery love,  
And hug the form of Death,  
Dance in Destruction’s dance,  
To him the Mother comes.

one can listen through the combination of the syllables ‘dance’, ‘destruction’, and ‘comes’ the particular sounds of a pakhwaj, that percussion instrument so characteristic of Kali kirtanas, which produces a grave sound that reverberates in the centre of one’s breast. Real high poetry occurs when the music of the words utilized to express an idea, the rhythm of those word-sounds, and the metre of the verses are well harmonized in an integrated whole.

Till the last part of his life, Amado Nervo, another of the most spiritual poets of Latin America, combined in his poetry the sound of words in such a way as to produce a kind of celestial music impossible to describe—an out-of-the-world subtle music that keeps the conceptions of his poems not ‘ringing’ in one’s mind, not even in one’s heart, but ‘existing’ in one’s soul. We will have to remain contented here with a sparkle of Amado’s deep ideas and imagine the musical medium he used to express them.

## A Monk at Heart

Born on 27 August 1870 in Tepic, a small and beau-

tiful Mexican city, Amado Nervo felt inclined towards monastic life from his very childhood. He had ‘studied in a secondary school that was also a seminary. Soon he abandoned his studies in order to find employment to help his family’s economic difficulties. After a stormy first romantic relationship, he returned to the seminary and in 1891 began his theological studies for the priesthood.’<sup>1</sup> There, in his cloister at the Christian seminary, he imagined the crystallization of his fate: he dreamt he was merged in God. But the reality was different, and in consequence the verses of his adolescence convey the bitterness of the spirit tenaciously stretching its arms towards ‘love’ and failing to attain it. Many times, against the uselessness of his quest, he would ‘return to his cloister’ disappointed—his soul yearned to nestle for ever in Christ’s wounds. These memories would remain for long within him. A few years later he wrote:

In the cruel wound of your side  
the anima wants to make its nest  
forgetting the dreams it has lived  
and the sad lies it has dreamt.<sup>2</sup>

‘Once again, the economic distress of his family made him seek a new job in Tepic and then in Mazatlán, where he helped a lawyer and wrote for the daily *El Correo de la Tarde* (The Evening Post).’<sup>3</sup> After leaving the seminary he started publishing his writings, which varied from the difficulties of seminary life—*El bachiller* (The Student, 1895)—to the dangers of living without a spiritual purpose—*Pascual Aguilera* (1896). He subsisted also by writing articles in important newspapers and books of poetry surcharged with Christian mysticism. He next published *Perlas negras* (Black Pearls, 1896) and *Místicas* (Mystical Poems, 1898),

where one can see that the monk in him was still alive. Famous of this series is the poem 'A Kempis' (To Kempis), a verse of which reads:

I run away from all binding land,  
no affection my mind cheers up,  
and with your book under my arm  
I am travelling through the dark night ...<sup>4</sup>

### The Divine Feminine

He travelled to Europe and attended the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, in which Swami Vivekananda was also present. There in Paris Amado again pursued 'love', but this time earthly—he met Ana Dailliez in 1901, the woman who dazzled him and accompanied him for ten years. But it seems his place in the world was somewhere between that of a monk and a layman, as Ana passed away untimely of a painful illness, leaving a commotion in the spirit of our sensitive poet: 'After several comfortable years in Madrid, Nervo suffered the loss of his lover Dailliez, of whom so little is known, in 1912. That episode had a profound effect on Nervo's work. The great pain after her death made Nervo return to the idea of a divine God, and all his works after this date carry a religious connotation.'<sup>5</sup>

The veneration he had towards Ana as an ideal woman, and not as a mere object of enjoyment or a personal possession, was reflected in his works, lectures, and discourses of that period. For Amado, there was no glorious era in the world that was not preceded by one or several women. Greece gave to the divine philosophers divine interlocutresses too; Rome had as many admirable women as men. Swami Tathagatananda also reminds us that 'literature all over the world glorifies mother-love as the most sacred form of dedication.'<sup>6</sup> Amado's pen reflects this ideal of a woman companion and mother in one.

Woman, for this poet, is the centripetal spiritual force of this world. Coming out a bit from the chronological narration, we jump to *Plenitud* (Plenitude, 1918), one of his masterpieces in prose. It is remarkable that in a strong paternal and macho culture, as was Latin America's a hundred

years back, a well-known journalist and diplomat, as Amado was around that time, could boldly write something like this:

The Persian proverb said: 'Do not harm the woman even with the petal of a rose.'

I tell you: 'Do not hurt her even in thought.'

Young or old, ugly or beautiful, frivolous or austere, bad or good, woman always knows the secret of God.

If the Universe has a clear, evident, undeniable goal, regardless of philosophies, this goal is Life—Life, the one doctress who will explain the Mystery; and perpetuation of Life was entrusted, by the Being of all beings, to woman.

Woman is God's only effective collaborator, her flesh is not like ours; in the vilest of women there is something divine.

God himself has kindled the stars in her irresistible eyes.

Fate incarnates in her will, and if God's love is similar to anything in this world, it is, without doubt, similar to mothers' love.<sup>7</sup>

This reflection of Amado remind us of Sister Nivedita's words about Swami Vivekananda: 'His [Vivekananda's] own effort being constantly to banish fear and weakness from his own consciousness and to learn to recognise THE MOTHER as instinctively in evil, terror, sorrow, and annihilation, as in that which makes for sweetness and joy.'<sup>8</sup> Can we affirm that Amado 'experienced' this? He also wrote: 'The best sign of a race's culture is its attitude towards woman'<sup>9</sup>, echoing Swami Vivekananda's statement: 'The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.'<sup>10</sup>

True to his Latin American culture—which worships Mother Nature, Mother Earth, Mother God—he praises Her in multiple poems. 'Éxtasis' ('Ecstasy') is one such famous poem that is part of his book *Elección* (Loftiness, 1916). In it he writes:

Each time I find nature  
more supernatural, more pure and holy.  
For me everything, all around, is beauty;  
and with the same plenitude enchants me  
the mouth of the mother when she prays,  
as the mouth of the child when he sings.<sup>11</sup>

Like any other young poet Amado wrote plenty of poems on earthly love, but unlike the majority Amado presented earthly love as a means to approach a kind of idyllic, unreachable love-ideal many times associated with the divine, and sensuality, though intensely felt, was either a means that fell short of touching that ideal or a real obstacle to approaching it.

That afternoon, in the poplar grove, mad  
of love, the sweet idolatry of mine  
offered me the elegancy of her mouth.

And the Buddha of basalt smiled ...

Another man came later, and her spell  
stole from me; I met her, and in the shade  
we exchanged epistles and curls.

And the Buddha of basalt smiled ...

Today is one year since the lost love.  
To the place I return and, as I am worn-out  
after a lengthy walk, climb to the top  
of the plinth where the symbol rests.  
Defeated and bloody the day dies  
and in the arms of the Buddha of basalt  
catches me the mysterious moon.

And the Buddha of basalt smiled ...<sup>12</sup>

This poem, which has a multiple-level reading, is an example of what was said in the beginning—that in Amado's poetry the music and rhyme are integral part of the meaning. In its original Spanish, this is a hendecasyllabic poem, with an atypical rhyme 'abaB cbcB ddefbefB'. The line which is separated (B) and repeated carries the word 'basalt', which has an almost cacophonous sound that breaks four times the soft cadence of the rest of the poem. On the other hand, basalt is the stone which the Buddha is made of and it stands for something lasting, consistent, in opposition to the 'wheel' of samsara—the rest of the poem—which moves so softly and imperceptibly when one is unaware, in spite of the repeated warning signs. This particular 'effect' created through the rhyme and music of words, and reinforced by the 'constant' smile of the Buddha, is what makes an idea go deep into the heart

of a sensitive person, who then can think or feel: 'How blind and foolish I was—or am—to be carried away by the impermanent flow of this samsara: passionate love, disillusion, and late repentance.' To use a dissonant note in a tonal composition, preserving the inner force and integrity of the whole poem, to produce such an effect is something reserved for those who in India are called *maha-kavis*, great poets.

### The Eastern Touch

By 1905 Amado was well known in his country as a journalist and poet. After the death of his mother he wrote a couple of books of prose—*Otras vidas* (Other Lives, 1905) and *Almas que pasan* (Souls that Pass, 1906)—which introduced for the first time a kind of fantastic atmosphere, later called 'magical realism'. This was the prelude to what many Latin American writers followed throughout the twentieth century for the short narrative genre, probably reaching its pinnacle in the Colombian noble laureate Gabriel García Márquez.

In his next two books of poetry—*Los jardines interiores* (The Inner Gardens, 1905) and *En voz baja* (In a Low Voice, 1909)—the Eastern influence in him starts to show its vein. In these poems

Nervo searches for transcendent beauty in an attempt to find a deeper spiritual significance. These collections confirm his interest in the esoteric and in the idea of pantheism. Until that point, some of his poems were heavily influenced by the Symbolist poets and subsequently dwelled on philosophy, mysticism, and even melancholy. Nervo deviated from any fixed literary persuasion and concentrated even more on his personal quest for spirituality. He questioned the tenets of Christianity by exploring the renunciation of the material world advocated by Hindu and Buddhist religions. After studying philosophy and mysticism, Nervo hoped to better understand both natural and supernatural existence. ...

Nervo's search always expressed a deep affirmation of God's existence, and his poetry can be read as one of the most vivid religious and spiritual pursuits in all Hispanic *modernismo*.<sup>13</sup>

Of this time is *Serenidad* (Serenity), where he writes:

I am not too wise to deny you,  
Lord; I find logical your divine existence;  
it is enough for me to open my eyes to find you;  
the entire creation invites me to adore you,  
and I adore you in the rose and I adore you in  
the thorn.<sup>14</sup>

In the same collection of poems one sometimes finds revived the monk in him:

O, Siddhartha Gautama! You were right:  
sorrows come to us from desire; the paradise  
consists in not craving, in renunciation  
absolute, irrevocable, of all possession;  
who does not desire anything, anywhere is well.

Desire is a glass of infinite bitterness,  
an octopus of insatiable tentacles which,  
when cut off, reappear for our torture.  
Desire is the father of depression, of surfeit,  
and there is in it more perfidity than waves in  
the sea!

Who drinks as the Cynic<sup>15</sup> the water  
with his hand,  
who dares give one's back to money,  
who loves above all things the Arcane,  
he is the victorious, the strong, the sovereign,  
and there is no peace comparable  
to his perennial peace!<sup>16</sup>

Amado, like all high spiritual people, was not a political fighter or a reformer, as is equally true of the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, who though living in a country ruled by a foreign power and having great influence on their surroundings, understood that the solution to all social problems lies only at root level, at the bottom of the human heart.

The Mexican Revolution that started in 1910 resulted in a virtual cessation of Mexican diplomatic services, and in 1912 Nervo was suspended as a diplomat, causing him economic distress. The so-

cial chaos provoked by the Mexican Revolution, however, aroused little, if any, echo in Nervo's literary works. In contrast to the social and political concerns visible in the works of several *modernista* authors, Nervo preferred to keep his concerns turned inward toward the mysterious questions of life and death, religion and spirituality. After Nervo's temporary loss of his diplomat position, the Spanish government offered him a pension, but he did not accept it, opting instead to support his household through writing and editorial work until 1916, when he resumed work as a member of the foreign service. Finally, the newly implanted Mexican government asked him to return, and in 1918 he was appointed minister plenipotentiary to Argentina and Uruguay.<sup>17</sup>

On 30 July 1916, after reading the Spanish translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—the English version by Mahendranath Gupta published by Swami Abhedananda in the US in 1907—he wrote from Madrid to the translator Ricardo Vivíé in Buenos Aires:

You have done to me a very valuable present by sending seven books. All are nice indeed, but above all of them is, in my view, that admirable *Gospel of Ramakrishna*, which has been a true revelation to me. How much depth under its crystal-line ingenuity! What beautiful parables! (For instance, the one of the wall behind which is the absolute!) ... this exquisite *Gospel of Ramakrishna*, so profoundly familiar, so familiarly profound. From today it will be one of my bedside books; of those I carry with me everywhere. It is a sweet and mystic little lamp to search God outside this spider's web of philosophies, rites, metaphysical disputes. It is impregnated with a very pure love, and no threat casts its shadow on these pages of mysterious whiteness.

### 'As Legacy the Whole Eternity'

The last period of Amado's poetic work includes *Elevación* (Loftiness), *Plenitud* (Plenitude), *El estanque de los lotos* (The Pond of Lotuses, 1919), and *El arquero divino* (The Divine Archer, 1922). In *Plenitud* he summarizes his religious thoughts, mys-

tical spirit, and meditations in search of spiritual perfection. *El estanque de los lotos* has three epigraphs, one of which is a saying of Swami Vivekananda, and has poems like 'Kalpa', 'El Maya' (The Maya), 'Brahma no piensa ...' (Brahma Does Not Think ...). We do not know of any other *littérateur* in Latin America, prior to Amado, who had written so extensively and explicitly Vedantic ideas in prose and poetry, sometimes even using Sanskrit terminology. *Plenitud* and *El estanque de los lotos* are full of Vedantic concepts and exhortations, as if he wanted to awaken his readers to a new dimension. The topics range from jnana to bhakti, from dualism to monism.

As the spark sleeps in the pebble  
and the statue in the mud,  
in you sleeps the divinity.  
Only by the strike of a constant and strong  
pain, emerges from the inert stone  
the thunderbolt of the deity.

Therefore, don't complain of destiny  
as that which is divine inside you  
arises only thanks to Him.  
Bear, if possible, smiling,  
the life the ARTIST is sculpting,  
the hard strike of the chisel.

What are to you the bad hours,  
if at each hour in your nascent wins  
he adds one beautiful feather more?  
You will see the condor at its highest,  
you will see the sculpture finished,  
you will see, soul, you will see ...<sup>18</sup>

Or this extraordinary poem, in which the traditional concepts of Christian and Vedantic mysticism have been beautifully blended:

You are one with God, because you love him,  
your pettiness, what does it matters,  
and your misery,  
you are one with God, because you love him!

You searched him in books,  
you searched him in temples,  
you searched him in the stars,

and one day the heart told you, tremulous:  
'Here is he', and since then you are one with him,  
You two are already one, because you love him.

Neither the pleasure of life  
nor the pain of death  
can separate you two.

In the pleasure you are to see his face,  
in the pain you are to see his face,  
in life and death you are to see his face.

'God!' You'll say in the kisses,  
you'll say 'God!' in the songs,  
you'll say 'God!' in the sighs.

And finally, understanding that illusory is  
all sin (as all life),  
and that nothing from him can separate you,  
one with God you'll feel forever:  
one with God alone, because you love him.<sup>19</sup>

As was said in the beginning, till the last part of his life, Amado's poetry carried a music, a kind of internal rhythm which was part and parcel of the ideas he transmitted. In his last period, he gradually dropped off all forms and external styles in a serious attempt to reach, through the bare purity and essence of words, that 'from where speech and mind come back defeated'. He penned those unadorned verses after showing to himself and to the world, through his refined work, that he abandons aesthetic forms not because he has not the capacity to proceed in that line, but because he has transcended it. A poem which shows that tendency, though still composed in lines of fourteen syllables and a simple 'abab cdcd' rhyme—with a genial break 'in the Time ...'—is 'Identidad' ('Identity'), in which the author wrote as epigraph the *mahavakya* 'tat-tvam-asi':

He who knows that is one with God,  
achieves Nirvana:  
a Nirvana in which all gloominess is illumined;  
vertiginous widening of human consciousness,  
which is only the projection of the Divine Idea  
in the Time ...

The phenomenon, the external, vain fruit  
of illusion, extinguishes itself:  
plurality is no more,  
and the 'I', ecstatic, finally plunges  
into the absolute,  
and has as legacy the whole eternity!<sup>20</sup>



Amado Nervo

On 24 May 1919 Amado Nervo died of a heart attack in Montevideo, shortly after taking up his duties at the Mexican embassy. An unusual tribute was paid to his memory: after prolonged ceremonies and memorials held in his honour, which involved people ranging from dip-

lomats to students, the government of Uruguay escorted his body to Mexico in a battle cruiser, to which another cruiser of the Argentine navy joined first and later on several war and civilian ships of other Latin America countries, creating thus a naval procession. At the time of his death, he was one of the first literary celebrities in the Hispanic world; he had already achieved an extraordinary renown, acclaimed by both the people and the intellectual elites.<sup>21</sup> His biographers tell us that his personality was as appealing as his work, that 'he was always kind, kind on every account because of the beauty of being kind', as he wrote in one of his poem. To one and all he truly was 'Amado'—which in Spanish means 'beloved', the name given by his father.

### Tailpiece

To measure how deep Indian ideas have penetrated Latin American literature demands a separate and extensive research. We know for certain that Rabindranath Tagore greatly influenced the

generation of Latin American writers of the first half of the twentieth century. Apart from Ricardo Güiraldes and Amado Nervo, three other renowned *littérateurs* who have openly acknowledged India's influence in their writings can be mentioned here. One is the Chilean Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957), the first Latin American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature, who said: 'While Tagore awakened the latent music in me, another Indian Sri Aurobindo, brought me to religion. He opened the way to my religious consecration. Indeed my debt to India is very great and is due in part to Tagore and in part to Sri Aurobindo.'<sup>22</sup> Another female *littérateur*, the avant-garde Argentine Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979), wholly admired India, considered herself a Gandhian, and housed Rabindranath Tagore for two months when the latter visited South America in 1924. And in recent times the Mexican Octavio Paz (1914–98), another nobel laureate, some of whose writings reflect the Eastern spirit, and who wrote *Vislumbres de la India* (In Light of India)—a well received book in which he briefly mentions Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda—after his experiences as ambassador in India.

We can conclude that any deep poet or writer tries to touch the silence in the middle of life's mist. God in the mist, in the silence; God in the chiselled verse, God-Love. When earthly love has the conscience of solidarity, of intimate union, the aesthetics of a feeling of love is designed by the most guileless freedom of expression and the rigid strength of fidelity to an ideal that turns sacramental all signs.

Through these lines we have travelled from aesthetics to mysticism, from beauty to silence, from the soundless scream to intimacy permeated with tenderness. The artist knows that the summit is the nook where love reveals all and demands stillness to translate its joy—the joy of God, who is 'the Great Poet, the Ancient Poet; the whole universe is His poem, coming in verses and rhymes and rhythms, written in infinite bliss.'<sup>23</sup>

PB

(References on page 254)

# ***The Tapasvin as a Poet: Kavyakantha Vasishtha Ganapati Muni***

**Dr Prema Nandakumar**

**K**AVYAKANTHA GANAPATI MUNI was a child of the Vedic revival during the Indian renaissance, which was a consequence of the shock treatment of 1857. He was born on 17 November 1878, as a gift of Suryanarayana, the presiding deity of Arasavilli. His father, Narasimha Sastri of Kaluvarayi in Andhra Pradesh, considered him an emanation from Agni. Quite early in life Ganapati indicated in many ways his genius, which was to accomplish much in the future. A *śrutidhara*, one who masters a thing hearing it just once, he was voracious when it came to learning. In his tenth year itself, he composed a poem, 'Pandava Dhartarashtra Sambhava' (Origin of the Pandavas and the Children of Dhritarashtra). He made an in-depth study of traditional Sanskrit and Telugu and was also initiated into 'Sri Vidya Upasana' and mantra japa by his father. Ganapati was married to Vishalakshi when he was twelve years old.

In keeping with the traditional thought currents, Ganapati decided to undertake tapasya. He travelled on his own and met his meagre needs by the income he made out of reading and explaining traditional classics like the Mahabharata. After having had varied experiences, he returned home and set up family with Vishalakshi, who was an ideal wife. During these days he had a vision of Goddess Bhuvaneshwari giving him a cup of honey. Since then, wonderful poetry flowed from him with astonishing ease. The raja of Mandasa took a liking to him and sent him to the Navadwip Pandita Parishad, a conference of scholars in Bengal. At the Parishad's annual gathering, Ganapati was put to severe test in Sanskrit. He came out with flying colours and was honoured with the title 'Kavyakantha, one whose throat brings out poetry'. Eminent scholars

of the day attested with their signatures a certificate with the following note: 'May the fame acquired by the best of ancient poets, Kalidasa and others, follow you now. May you shine forth with splendour, adorned by the charming title "Kavyakantha" conferred on you by discerning scholars of distinction.' It was 2 June 1900. Every word of the benediction came true in the following years.

One of the memorable events that turned him completely towards a life of austerity occurred when he was serving as a teacher at Vellore. When his headmaster Thomas Harris remarked that Vedic tapasya was no more a possibility, Ganapati resigned his job and went to Tiruvannamalai. That was in 1907. In his authentic biography of Ganapati Muni, G Krishna has related the latter's experiences and his meeting with Brahmana Swami in the Virupaksha Cave. The young swami gave Ganapati Muni the directions for performing tapasya: 'If one watches whence the notion of "I" arises, the mind gets absorbed there. That is tapas. And during japa, if one watches whence the mantra vibration, *dhvani*, arises, the mind gets absorbed there. That is tapas.'

Brahmana Swami was the future Ramana Maharshi, and it was Ganapati who first called him Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Ganapati was then not aware that Lakshmana Ayyar had referred to the swami as Ramana, and that his original name was Venkataraman. Now that he had a Master to guide him, he allowed his family to join him at Tiruvannamalai. He was thirty years old then. Soon he became popular as a *tapasvin*, ascetic, and a poet, and disciples thronged to him. Foremost among them were T V Kapali Sastri and Doraiswami Iyer. Ganapati moved to several places like Gokarna and

Padaividu, but always his tapasya continued amidst his various engagements. At Tiruvannamalai he had *kapala-bheda*, an experience of the divine current flowing from the crown of the head down through the spinal column. His tapasya was complete.

Though offers came to him from the Calcutta and Andhra universities to lead their department of oriental studies, Ganapati preferred his independence. He was busy teaching the disciples who came to him, initiating them in traditional mantra japa. He passed away suddenly at Kharagpur on 25 July 1936.

### Tapasvin, Scholar, Patriot

Such was the brief tenure of the corporeal life of a twentieth-century *tapasvin*. But there were worlds within worlds in the life of this tremendous scholar. His anxiety for a free India was obvious. He believed that only political freedom could help Indians spread their wings and scale the heights of spirituality like their Vedic ancestors. Ganapati Muni was an active speaker in the Congress party for a while and was stalked by the British government, which considered him to be a revolutionary. Though an orthodox brahmana who performed elaborate yajnas, Ganapati Muni was averse to untouchability and proved that the despicable custom had no Vedic sanction. He also averred that women had every right to perform Vedic rituals. He had no attraction for money, position, or power. For him, Ramana Maharshi was everything. Even when away from Tiruvannamalai, he wrote regularly to the Maharshi, and fifty of these Sanskrit letters have come down to us, revealing the intensity with which Ganapati Muni pursued tapasya. On 22 July 1931 he wrote with exultation: 'The grandeur of *Mantra-Sadhana* has been seen. The essence of *Yoga* has been perceived. The import of the scriptures has been scrutinized in particular. *Tapas* has been performed with concentration of mind. The play of *Kundalini-Shakti* has been investigated. The source of the *Ego* has been felt within. The transformation being effected by primordial Shakti Divine has been watched in tune with it in silence.'<sup>1</sup>

While alive, Ganapati Muni did not give much

attention to the printing and dissemination of his works. However, his disciples zealously guarded his letters, essays, and notes. These disciples included D S Vishwamitra, Vishwanatha Swamy, and Raju Sastri. Another disciple, K Natesan, made it his life's engagement to collect and copy down the works of Ganapati. Happily for us, these are now being published as the collected works of Ganapati Muni, a set of twelve volumes. Assisted by Dr Sampadananda Mishra, Natesan has already released ten volumes through Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai.

### Uma-sahasra

Poetry takes up a major portion of Ganapati Muni's *oeuvre*. Hymns long and short, either planned or those that poured down as a flood when he was lost in austerities, bring us the much-needed help to turn to the Divine. Almost all of them are on goddesses. As his chosen field was Tantra-yoga, the *Kena Upanishad*'s positing of Uma Haimavati has drawn him to write several prayers: 'Uma Trishati', 'Uma Aksharamala', as also the glorious *Uma-sahasra*, a sustained prayer in one thousand verses. According to him 'Uma' connotes the mantra Om, *a-u-m*. As we recite these prayers to the goddess, it becomes clear that Uma's name is *aparyāptāmrta*, the nectar that never satiates.

*Uma-sahasra* has a fine Sanskrit commentary, 'Prabha', by T V Kapali Sastri. We walk in the regions of the Divine with the very opening exclamation: '*Akṣhīlajaganmātomā*, Uma, the mother of the entire universe!' Here are forty *stavakas*, cantos, each containing twenty-five verses. Sastri refers to the work as a *pārāyaṇa grantha*, a text meant for repeated recitation, created in the immediate presence of Ramana Maharshi who was the very image of meditation. Sastri points out that the very first verse refers to the unfailing grace of Uma, while the second indicates the need for ceaseless aspiration on the part of the devotee:

*Akṣhīlajaganmātomā tamasā tāpena  
cākulānasmān;  
Anugrṇātv-anukampā-sudhārdrayā  
hasita-candrikayā.*

May Uma, the mother of the whole world, bless us who are afflicted with darkness and suffering with the moonlight of her smile, moist with the nectar of compassion.

*Nikhileṣu pravahantīm  
nirupādhi-vimarśa-yoga-dṛśyormim;  
Ajarām-ajām-ameyām kāmapi  
vande mahāśaktim.*

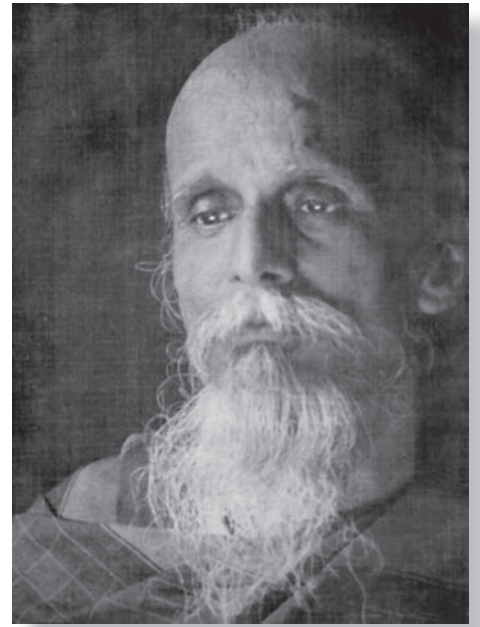
To that indefinable great Power, un-aging, unborn, immeasurable, flowing in all, whose waves are perceivable only to the eye of the yoga of deliberation without adjunct, I bow.<sup>2</sup>

As we move from one canto to another, we find the Mother as the transcendent Supreme and as Vedic and Tantric deities. She is Puruṣa-Prakṛiti, the Trimurti, and the Panchamurti. She is the kundalini which moves in the human body.

Our progress with the poem's stately verses takes us to familiar places in India where the Divine Mother is worshipped: Kanyakumari, Rameshwaram, Madurai, and Jambukeshwaram. We almost complete an all-India tour, going to Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bengal, Magadha, Banaras, and Avanti as well. The whole of the twenty-sixth canto is devoted to Goddess Apitakuchambal of Tiruvannamalai.

In cantos twenty-seven and twenty-eight we find ourselves in the *terribilità* of Prachanda Chandika and Renuka Devi. The poem concludes with an ecstatic paean to the Mother of Radiances. The place of *Uma-sahasra* in an aspirant's life can be gauged from Sastri's statement that for him writing the commentary on the poem was itself *upāsana*, worship.

While each one of his stotras has a special grace surrounding it, the poems on Goddess Renuka need to be mentioned as an example of the power of the Word. Ganapati Muni had gone to Padaividu to revise the text of the *Uma-sahasra*. Instigated by one Sundara Pandya, the *Madras Mail* published a news item that Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri was gathering a band of revolutionaries in an isolated place! The police were now on his trail as they had been told that *Uma-sahasra* actually incited treason in the guise of praying to the Mother Goddess. While they followed him as he went round



Vasishtha  
Ganapati  
Muni

the circumambulation of Goddess Renuka's temple, he began composing a prayer to the presiding deity. Each round blossomed as one verse and when twenty-eight were over, 'Renuka-gita' was ready! Soon the police officials realized their folly and listened to him as he sat in the *maṇḍapa* and explained the meaning of the verses on Renuka that he had composed just then: '*Suraśīraccāra-carāṇa reṇukā, jagadadhīśvarī jayati reṇukā*; Renuka, whose feet tread upon the crowns of the gods; victory to Renuka, the empress of the worlds!'

Ganapati Muni's hymns reveal his Vedic inspiration and Puranic scholarship, making it a joy to learn and chant them. Without doubt, they are all charged with spiritual power.

### **Aphorisms, Commentaries, Essays**

An ascetic who gained vast spiritual knowledge through his visions, Ganapati Muni sometimes rendered his findings in aphorisms. From Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra* onwards, aphorisms have played an important part in the ethico-spiritual domain of Indian life. Easy to memorize, these condensed pellets of experiential wisdom have been useful for teachers guiding their flocks as they can comment and explain the sutras in the manner appropriate to the time and clime, down the ages.

The sutras composed by Ganapati Muni are the result of intense tapasya. His 'Mahavidya Sutra'—related to the *Dasha Mahavidya Tantra*—is said to have been composed in 1917. Ganapati Muni constantly related his personal experiences to achieve perfect authenticity for his writings, and he was never tired of revising his works. For instance, he had described the concept of *kapāla-bheda* in the meditation on Prachanda Chandika. He experienced this 'cracking of the skull' in 1922 while residing in the Mango Tree Cave in Tiruvannamalai. He was at that time composing a garland of verses on the deity Indrani. According to G Krishna, 'The skull of Nayana broke at the top wherefrom two channels connect the two ears on either side. The sound of breaking was clearly heard and a sort of smoke like thing that emanated through the aperture was also seen ... After this experience of Kapala-bheda he could clearly feel the flow of a current from Akasa through his Brahmarandhra and spinal column down to the Mooladhara. It was permeating his whole system and he was experiencing a happy release from the bodily bondage.'<sup>3</sup>

The 'Mahavidya Sutra' opens with Kali. She is all-pervading, the string of skulls round her neck speaks to us of the destruction of universes; creation is her dance, *kriyaiva tāṇḍavam-ucyate*; and evolution calls for the destruction and creation that she guides. Worship of Kali assures one of enhancement of spiritual power. Indeed, Kali is the sword in the hands of yogis.

In this manner Ganapati Muni sets down his meditations on the Mother Goddesses Tara, Sundari, Bhuvaneshwari, Bhairavi, Prachanda Chandika, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, and Kamalatmika. Half a century ago, Sri Sundara Krishna Vasishthan paid glowing tributes to the 'Mahavidya Sutra', praising the Sundari and Prachanda Chandi chapters in particular: 'These two chapters are masterpieces in as much as they deal with the twin experiences namely the Darsan-anubhava [visual experience] and Sparsanubhava [experience of contact] of Atman obtained by Guru Ramana and Sishya Ganapathy. They are therefore

the quintessence of all sadhanas.'<sup>4</sup>

Other sutras written by him include 'Rudrakutumba Sutra' and 'Srishti Sutra'. The 'Aindreshvara-bheda Sutra' seeks to prove that Indra and Shiva are but one, and that the concepts of Rudra and Indra are analogous. People of earlier times referred to the soul within Prakriti as Indra. In modern times the soul is referred to as Rudra, for, according to Ganapati Muni, this is the second Creation.

Ganapati Muni has also gifted us with *vyākhyāna*, commentaries, of commonly used terms like *gāyatri*, 'yoga', 'Sita', and 'Krishna'. These commentaries communicate entire areas of experience in crystalline Sanskrit. Take 'Sita Vyakhyana' for instance. Who is Sita? She is the all-beautiful noble woman: *uttamottamā nārī*. She is Lakshmi, her life-story is sweet, *carite-madhura*. Her birth—was she *ayonijā*, not born out of a womb, or was she born to human parents?—leads the muni to cogitate on what constitutes an incarnation. An incarnation does not fall into the world as a soul concealed in material form. The incarnation literally steps down—that is what *avatarāṇa* means—illuminated by the conscious awareness of what is happening. Such is Sita, who is the ideal for *pativratās*, chaste wives. Her greatness is seen in her mastery over the elements: Fire, when she prays for the safety of Hanuman who is torching Lanka; Earth, when she enters its womb; and Wind, when she remains without eating food in Lanka. Indeed, she became a goddess to her husband Rama, who worshipped her as a golden image even when he had given her up, *patyurapi devatevābhūt sā bhagavatī*.

(To be concluded)

## Notes and References

1. Translated by Sri Vishwanatha Swamy, See Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, *Epistles of Light* (Madras: Kavyakantha Vasishtha Ganapati Muni Trust, 1978).
2. Translated by T V Kapali Sastri.
3. G Krishna, *Nayana* (Madras: Kavyakantha Vasishtha Ganapati Muni Trust, 1978), 134. Ramana Maharshi used to address Ganapati Muni as 'Nayana'.
4. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, *Mahavidyadī Sūtrā-granthavali* (Madras: Kavyakantha Vasishtha Ganapati Muni Trust, 1958), 3.

# ***Sri Ramakrishna and the Common People***

**Swami Tathagatananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**D**INA MUKHERJEE was another pious person who lived near Baghbazar. He was very poor. The Master so loved the pure in heart that he did not wait to be invited to their homes. One day he asked Mathur to take him to Dina's house. It was so small and crowded with people that they could not find a place to sit. On their way back to Dakshineswar Mathur complained to Sri Ramakrishna about these inconveniences, but the Master remained very light-hearted about it.<sup>17</sup>

## ***The Master's Merciful Attitude towards a Temple Priest***

Chandra Halder, a priest of the Kali temple at Kalighat and Mathur's family priest, was envious of Mathur's steadfast loyalty to the Master. He had applied all his magical powers to control Mathur and was convinced that the Master had secretly cast a stronger spell over Mathur to make him his loyal devotee. For this reason, he asked Sri Ramakrishna to teach him the mantra to control Mathur and captivate the minds of other influential people. The Master, of course, knew that all devotees came to him only due to the grace of the Divine Mother and not because of any enchantments. But Halder would not believe him. His failure to extract a magical spell from Sri Ramakrishna festered long in his mind.<sup>18</sup>

Halder often visited Mathur's Janbazar house. One day he arrived at Mathur's house and found the Master there alone in a poorly lit room. Sri Ramakrishna was lying on the floor in an ecstatic mood. Looking down at him, Halder was convinced that the Master was only pretending to be in a state of samadhi in order to impress Mathur and gain his

financial support. The sight of Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi at Mathur's house was more than Halder could tolerate and all his accumulated anger and jealousy were released. He kicked the Master violently as he lay there on the floor. The boots he was wearing left black marks on the Master's body.

The Master was an ocean of mercy. He related this story one day at Shyampukur to Narendra and other devotees only because Doctor Sarkar asked him about it. He said: 'Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it, but I forbade them.'<sup>19</sup> He never reported the matter because he knew that if Mathur learned about this outrageous act, he might punish the priest harshly. When Mathur did, in fact find out about it, he remarked: 'Father, if I had known that then, he would have been killed.'<sup>20</sup> The Master's response to Mathur's statement speaks volumes about his profound humility and compassion: 'You see, the man really believed me to be the possessor of some magic charm. I tried my best on many occasions to remove this false idea from his mind, but I could not do it.'<sup>21</sup> The Master's direct disciple Swami Shivananda commented on this incident: 'You see, our Lord had different moods. With respect to Halder he was not in the mood of the Guru transforming the disciple; in relation to him he was like an ordinary devotee, who must see the Lord in the poor, in the ignorant, in the wicked' (207). Eventually Mathur Babu had to dismiss Halder for a serious dereliction of duty some time after his violent act towards the Master.

## ***The Master with Bohemians: Girish Chandra Ghosh***

Girish Chandra Ghosh was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He was also a hopeless bohemian

the first time he came to the Master. His personal account of Sri Ramakrishna's love for him is well known. Though the Master's purity would not allow him to touch any impure person, still he made Girish feel his eternal love. Girish, who could hardly control himself when he was drunk, gave his own testimony of Sri Ramakrishna's expression of genuine love for him when he visited the Master in that shameful state:

One night, in a euphoric and drunken mood, I was visiting a house of prostitution with two of my friends. But suddenly I felt an urge to visit Sri Ramakrishna. My friends and I hired a carriage and drove out to Dakshineswar. It was late at night, and everyone was asleep. The three of us entered Sri Ramakrishna's room, tipsy and reeling. Sri Ramakrishna grasped both my hands and began to sing and dance in ecstasy. The thought flashed through my mind: 'Here is a man whose love embraces all—even a wicked man like me, whose own family would condemn me in this state. Surely this holy man, respected by the righteous, is also the saviour of the fallen.'<sup>22</sup>

After the passing of Sri Ramakrishna, during a weekly meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission at the house of Balaram Bose on 15 August 1897, Girish said, 'I have never received such love from anyone. To me, Sri Ramakrishna is the Lord; he is God-incarnate. A single utterance of his removed the doubts of a lifetime from my mind. Even now, if I see doubts begin to stir, I think of him. Immediately they vanish and do not rise again. I find that it is not difficult to obey him, love him, and worship him. But indeed, it is difficult to forget him.'<sup>23</sup>

One very hot afternoon Girish visited Sri Ramakrishna at the Kashipur garden house. Sri Ramakrishna's sickness was so advanced at that time that he did not have enough strength even to stand up. His body was in a painful emaciated state. The Master asked Latu to give Girish some snacks bought from Fagu's famed shop in Baranagar bazar nearby. While Girish was enjoying his refreshments, the Master knew that he would need something cool to drink. There was an earthen

jug in the southeast corner of his room. 'There is some nice water here,' he said. The Master's disciples present there were amazed to see him move slowly like a child across the floor to the jug so that he could himself offer water to Girish! The Master found that it was not cool, but since no better water was available he gave it very reluctantly to Girish.<sup>24</sup> Such were the Master's deep feelings towards his devotees. It may be recalled that Girish's good friend Kalipada Ghosh, a bohemian like him, was also blessed by Sri Ramakrishna and became his very close devotee.

The monks at Banaras asked Girish about Sri Ramakrishna. He described the day at Dakshineswar when he had seen Sri Ramakrishna weeping profusely like any ordinary bereaved person. He had never seen the Master cry in this way. Surprised and unable to understand the cause of the Master's weeping, he asked the Master the reason for his crying. Sri Ramakrishna told Girish that his weak constitution always required him to travel by boat or horse-carriage to visit devotees, whereas Nityananda, a disciple of Sri Chaitanya, could easily travel to the homes of devotees because he was blessed with a strong body. Had he been endowed with good health, he too would have been able to walk to his devotees' homes.

### ***Bhagavati, the Maidservant***

Bhagavati was an elderly maidservant of the temple owner at Dakshineswar. She had led an immoral life in her younger days and still retained a proud ego. Sri Ramakrishna had known her for many years and was very compassionate towards her. In an early chapter of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find her speaking with pride to the Master in his room at Dakshineswar on 4 June 1883. M and Rakhal were also present. Bhagavati was encouraged by the universal love of Sri Ramakrishna and touched his holy feet: 'Like a man stung by a scorpion, Sri Ramakrishna stood up and cried out, "Govinda! Govinda!" A big jar of Ganges water stood in a corner of the room. He hurried there, panting, and washed with the holy water the spot

the maidservant had touched. The devotees in the room were amazed to see this incident. Bhagavati sat as if struck dead.<sup>25</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna saw only the Divine Mother in all women. He never reprimanded Bhagavati and relieved her sense of shame, saying gently, 'You should salute me from a distance' (235). The Master then sang three songs about the Divine Mother to console her. Bhagavati later fulfilled two requests of the Master that day at Dakshineswar—she went on several pilgrimages and made noble use of her money by giving it to charity.

### **The Master's Transforming Touch: Binodini**

On 21 September 1884 Sri Ramakrishna left Dakshineswar to see a religious play on Sri Chaitanya's early life, *Chaitanya Lila*, at the Star Theatre. Girish had selected the actress Binodini for the main role of Sri Chaitanya. Though Binodini had an unchaste lifestyle, Sri Ramakrishna praised her acting and blessed her profusely after the performance. He touched her head with the words, 'Be illumined.'

After receiving Sri Ramakrishna's blessed touch, Binodini began to regard him as the living God. He fulfilled her longing to see him again during his last days at Shyampukur. There, he spoke briefly with her and was pleased with her faith and devotion. 'He gave her a little spiritual instruction that she might have faith in and reliance on God, and bade good-bye to her soon afterwards. She shed tears of joy and repentance, touched adoringly his holy feet with her head and went away.'<sup>26</sup>

In her autobiography, Binodini wrote: 'I do not care if the world looks upon me with disgust because I know that most revered Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeva had graced me. His loving, hopeful message of "Hari is guru, guru is Hari", gives me hope even today. When afflicted with unbearable burden of heart, I feel as if his compassionate smiling form appears in my heart and tells: "Hari is guru, guru is Hari".'<sup>27</sup> After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Binodini, at the height of her career, voluntarily gave up her profession on 1 January 1887.

She married and spent the rest of her life worshipping God with devotion.

### **Manmatha**

There is also the case of Manmatha, the notorious wrestler and ruffian who was hired to intimidate the Master and prevent him from visiting devotees in Baghbazar. Yogin Ma lived in that area, in Nebubagan and used to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Her brother Hiralal strongly disapproved of this. When Yogin Ma invited the Master to her house at Nebubagan, Hiralal hired Manmatha to intimidate the Master so that he would no longer visit devotees in that locality. Due to his reputation as an expert fighter, Manmatha was feared by the toughest gangs of Calcutta. In his reminiscences, Swami Akhandananda wrote: 'After Manmatha saw the Master and heard a few words from him, he fell at his feet and said to him weeping, "My Lord, I am guilty. Please forgive me." The Master replied, "Come one day to Dakshineswar."<sup>28</sup>

Manmatha did visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar a few days later with Gangadhar (later Swami Akhandananda), who agreed to go with him on request. When he approached the Master, Sri Ramakrishna simply touched him. The Master's mere touch gradually transformed Manmatha completely. At Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna treated him tenderly and affectionately. He asked Manmatha to wear again the sacred thread which he had removed some time before and led him to the Kali temple where he blessed him.

Manmatha became a most ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Within one or two visits he was so transformed that he began to repeat '*Priyanath, Priyanath*; Dear Lord, Dear Lord' constantly. He remained in Calcutta and sometime later people saw that he had been transformed outwardly as well as inwardly; his emaciated body reflected his severe austerities. Swami Akhandananda knew him well and reported that he saw him when he visited the Baranagar Monastery in 1890, while Swami Vivekananda and other swamis were present there. Manmatha's hands always remained folded, his lips

repeating constantly, 'Priyanath, Priyanath'. He had become completely detached from the world, and eventually had a peaceful death.

### **The Master's Love for Homeless Cats**

Two cats used to roam about in the temple compound at Dakshineswar. No one took proper care of them. Though Sri Ramakrishna was always absorbed in God-consciousness, his compassionate heart noticed the pitiable condition of those helpless stray cats. He could not bear their wretched condition.


The Master hesitatingly requested a lady devotee whether she could relieve his anxiety by taking care of those two cats and give them food and water at her house. Although Sri Ramakrishna had only to command the devotee, one has to note the manner of his approaching her. Of course, she was overjoyed at the Master's proposal and immediately responded to his appeal. She did it with such a loving heart that Sri Ramakrishna also extracted from her the promise to take care of the cats herself and not send them to anyone else. This very great devotee, admired both by Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi for her high spiritual quality, was none other than Nistarini Devi, the blessed wife of Navagopal Ghosh, in whose house Swami Vivekananda spontaneously composed the prayer: 'Om! Obeisance to you, Ramakrishna, who established dharma (on earth), who is the personification of all dharmas, and who is the best of avatars.'

### **Carriage Horses**

Sri Ramakrishna would often go to the homes of devotees in a horse carriage. Sometimes, the horses were undernourished and he was painfully aware of their weary burden whenever they had to pull a heavy load of passengers. If the coachman whipped the horses to spur them on, Sri Ramakrishna felt as if he himself was being whipped with every lash. For this reason the Master usually requested to be driven in a carriage sent by his devotee Beni Pal, who always provided a carriage with strong, healthy

horses whenever Sri Ramakrishna needed this service from him. It is evident that Sri Ramakrishna's heart always bled at the sight of the misery of creatures and humans alike.

Sri Ramakrishna came to recall humankind to God's righteous ways. He came to weld our shattered energies into a united force that would continue operating in the entire field of human life and endeavour. The spiritual wave of divine love that swept over humanity with Sri Ramakrishna's advent produced sacred literature, hymns of sublime majesty, and various sanctified art works. There were long periods in his life when he spoke little and was wholly immersed in devotion to God. His utterances about God and spiritual life are a divine summary of Truth, the light of which penetrated the hearts and minds of all who heard them.

Sri Ramakrishna's pithy sayings have a lasting effect on our spiritual character. His words in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* give us a taste of spiritual bliss. Making them known to the world so that all humanity may continue to receive their redeeming benefit remains the worthy way of acknowledging them as well as a genuine act of spiritual service. 

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# Vedanta-sara

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

## Chapter I: Preliminaries

### Introduction

**V**EDANTA-SARA is a *prakaraṇa grantha*, a monograph, in which the fundamental philosophy of Vedanta—as delineated in the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutra*, and other Shrutis—has been clearly explained. The essence of the Upanishads is that the jiva and Brahman are identical. *Vedanta-sara* teaches this fundamental principle, which helps any sadhaka build his or her spiritual life.

Sadananda Yogindra Saraswati, the author of this treatise, was a sannyasin who lived his life according to the guidelines laid down by Acharya Shankara. Nrisimha Saraswati, a disciple of the author, wrote *Subodhini*, a commentary on this book. A disciple of Madhusudana Saraswati wrote another commentary named *Vidwat-manoranjini*. All these commentators were great scholars.

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The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on *Vedanta-sara*, conducted between 8 December 1954 and 20 January 1955. The notes—taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur—have been edited and reconstructed by Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh. They do not contain a word-for-word explanation. Such a commentary by Swami Nikhilananda has been published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata. Instead, the swami selected some sections for detailed discussion while rapidly skipping through others. He has preferred to stress the importance of preliminary disciplines, without which the discussion on higher states of experience have no meaning except to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the reader. His emphasis has been on the practical side of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy. The interested reader would benefit from reading these notes along with Swami Nikhilananda's translation and notes.

In *Vedanta-sara* the author has followed the trend of the Upanishads, which advocate self-surrender through knowledge and understanding. There is nothing called the world: God alone exists. He alone is the real 'I' within us. You too must possess, through knowledge, the spirit of self-surrender at the feet of the Reality and the guru.

### 1. *Akhaṇḍam saccidānandam-avāṇ-manasa-gocaram; Ātmānam-akhilādhāram-āśraye'bhiṣṭa-siddhaye.*

*With the purpose of attaining my cherished desire, I take refuge in the Self—the Indivisible, the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss absolute—who is beyond the reach of word and thought and the substratum of all.*

Like Acharya Shankara, Sadananda Yogindra has also surrendered at the feet of his guru, considering him to be Brahman. Scriptural reading must reach the heart. You must have a clear idea about the ideal you want to achieve. So here, Sadananda is describing the nature of Brahman.

Sadananda says that Brahman is *akhaṇḍa*, indivisible. So, there should not be any *khaṇḍa*, limited, consciousness in your life: 'This is a man, that is a woman', and the like. God, the Reality, is in every object: this consciousness must be there. You must have the consciousness that all the various forms in the world are manifestations of the same Reality.

*Saccidānandam*: Whatever exists in the universe is absolute Existence. He existing, all names and forms exist. Side by side with existence, consciousness too is He. He is existence as well as consciousness. Whatever *ānanda*, bliss, is there in our life,

that too is He. Existence, consciousness, and bliss are the three aspects of everything, and that He is.

The aspirant must have the feeling that my existence depends upon Him, my consciousness is due to Him, and my bliss too is because of Him. Thus, all these three factors belong to Him. There is no 'me'. All is He. Likewise, existence, consciousness, and bliss of the universe also belong to Him. This is the infinite Ideal. Through this, try to completely merge in the Reality. Think that I cannot exist, I cannot be conscious, and I cannot have bliss without God. To attain the ideal, there must be clear idea about it. Let this knowledge vibrate within you before every spiritual practice. Then, it will manifest in your life.

*Avān-manasa-gocaram*: He is beyond the scope of speech and mind. You can describe a finite object by words and can think of it in your mind. All objects with name and form are within the scope of mind and speech. But since Brahman is beyond mind and speech, try to transcend name and form. If you remain immersed in name and form, you will move away from the ideal. Train your mind in such a way that the world of name and form may not enter it. We should have such *vairāgya* that the world and we, jivas, stop existing for us. As long as we are circumscribed within the 'we' and the world, so long there cannot be any contact with the ideal. Strengthen in your mind the consciousness that the Lord alone is manifest in everything. God is beyond mind and speech; you too must go beyond mind and speech.

*Ātmānam-akhilādhāram*: Brahman is the substratum, the support of the universe and all its creatures. At present your support in life is money, father, mother, and so forth; subject-object are your supports. Feel Him—the existence, consciousness, and bliss—as the support of all, through knowledge and understanding. Sadananda is thus surrendering, through understanding, at the feet of the Reality, which is the support of all.

*Abhīṣṭa-siddhaye*: For the fulfilment of our life's purpose. Begin your life's mission with this spirit of surrender. Do not be puffed up with ego and do

not take the support of money, family members, and the like.

## 2. *Arthato'py-advayānandān-atīta-dvaita-bhānataḥ; Gurūn-ārādhya vedānta-sāraṁ vaksye yathā-mati.*

*Having worshipped the guru who, on account of his being free from the illusion of duality, justifies the meaning of his name Advayananda, I undertake the task of expounding the essence of Vedanta according to my light.*

Sadananda's guru's name was Advayananda. Sadananda felt that his guru's nature too was *advayānanda*, the bliss of the non-dual, who is none other than God himself. There should be this type of devotion towards the guru. Sadananda says that he is beyond the world of duality, and that God himself has assumed the form of the guru through his lila, divine sport.

*Ārādhya*: Sadananda clearly experienced the presence of the guru in his heart. Whatever light of understanding arises in the heart by the grace of the guru, that is conducive to spiritual welfare. But we get puffed up by learning a little philosophy, thinking that we are very intelligent, that we have intuitive knowledge. This is nonsense. Have an attitude of surrender.

## 3. *Vedānto nāmopaniṣat-pramāṇam tad-upakāriṇi śārīrakasūtrādīni ca.*

*Vedanta is the evidence of the Upanishads, as well as the Shariraka Sutra and other works that help expound correctly the meaning of Vedanta.*

Vedanta is that type of direct evidence in which there is no subject-object duality. The subject that you see now is not the actual subject. The real subject you cannot see. The perception of the world is a relative perception of the external form only. We do not see the real subject.

The sources of ordinary knowledge are six:

- i) *Pratyakṣa*, direct perception: Just as I am seeing you and you are seeing me.
- ii) *Anumāna*, inference: Just as getting the knowledge of fire by seeing the associated smoke.

By inference Brahman cannot be known. It is known by the most direct perception in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, where there is no subject-object dichotomy. As long as ‘I and mine’, subject and object, are there, God cannot be realized. God alone exists; there is no me and mine.

iii) *Upamāna*, knowledge through comparison: For example, to make one understand what a crocodile is one may show a lizard for comparison: ‘A crocodile is like a lizard, but is very big and lives in water.’ The knowledge of Brahman is not possible in this way either. Nothing can stand comparison with Brahman.

iv) *Śabda*, scriptural testimony: The direct revelations of the sages recorded in the scriptures are the real evidence.

v) *Arthāpatti*, postulation or presumption: People say that the swami is fasting, but the swami goes on becoming obese. By this it is postulated that he must be eating something, since obesity and fasting are opposed to each other. The knowledge of Brahman is not possible through such postulations.

vi) *Anupalabdhi*, negative statement: The knowledge of a thing due to its non-perception.

What we need to note is that these six sources of worldly or secular knowledge are not the sources of direct personal knowledge of God. God can be known only by spiritual practice, self-surrender, and final realization.

*Tad-upakārīṇi śārīraka-sūtrādīni*: Other scriptures, like the Bhagavadgita and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, are helpful in acquiring knowledge. The direct revelations of realized souls—like those recorded in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the Bible, and similar texts—can also be considered Shastras.

The truths presented in the Upanishads have been elucidated by Sri Ramakrishna. These realized souls have clarified the truths given in such scriptures as Vyasa’s *Brahma Sutra*. This is Vedānta. Hence, these scriptures are to be followed, and not one’s own personal whims or the works of mere scholars.

#### 4. *Asya vedānta-prakaraṇatvāt tadyaiḥ eva anubandhaiḥ tadvattā-siddheḥ na te pṛthag-ālocanīyāḥ.*

*On account of its being a prakaraṇa, monograph, on Vedānta, the anubandhas, preliminary questions of the latter, serve its purpose as well. Therefore, they need not be discussed separately.*

The fundamentals of Vedānta, like the identity of Brahman and the individual soul—*tat-tvam-asi, aham-brahmasmi*—the nature of maya, of the gross body, and so forth are properly and clearly described in *prakaraṇa* texts.

#### 5. *Tatra anubandho nāma adhikāri-viśaya-sambandha-prayojanāni.*

*The preliminary questions of Vedānta are as follows: the determination of the competency of the student, the subject-matter, its connection with the book, and the necessity of its study.*

*Adhikārin*, competent person: While studying the scriptures you must fulfil certain conditions; then alone will you be able to feel the truths described

**T**o rightly and truly attain the spiritual goal of life, there must be a crystal clear understanding of the ideal, which we learn from the scriptures and from the words of the guru and realized souls. This spiritual understanding is not dependent upon the intellectual ability or the academic qualifications of the aspirant, but it is a matter of intuitive understanding and personal experience, which depends entirely upon the purity of one’s life. Only he who has practised strict continence, discernment, and non-attachment, who has done *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*, and who has led a life of strict discipline, becomes calm, because he has no mental digressions and distractions. Only in such a sadhaka with an absolutely pure heart and calm mind, this intuitive intelligence awakens. As soon as spiritual truths are told to such an aspirant, they intuitively flash in his heart; truth flashes from within his or her own being.

—Swami Bhaskareswarananda

therein. The student of scriptures must have some psychological qualifications; only academic qualifications will not do. It also does not mean that you must be a brahmana. You must be an *adhikārin*, otherwise you will misunderstand the scriptures. If your life is pure, you will feel the spirit of the scriptures within. Spiritual understanding is of a different type. So, first purify yourself by doing work with a detached mind. Do not do forbidden work or work prompted by desire. Follow the scriptures and understand them.

*Viśaya*, subject matter: You must know the fundamental theme of the scriptures—that Brahman, the embodied soul, and the universe are identical. Then you will be able to think in similar lines. Otherwise, while the scriptures are telling one thing, you may go on thinking in a different line. The scriptures show various ways of reaching this fundamental theme: that the jiva is not different from Brahman.

*Sambandha*, the connection between the

theme and the statement of the scriptures: The fundamental theme is that actually there is no ‘second’, ‘*na apara asti*’. The statement ‘*sarvaṁ khalvidam brahma*’, all is indeed Brahman’ must be understood properly. Your very thought, your understanding of this statement must be tuned to the theme. All the *upāsana*s, spiritual practices, described in the Upanishads are for the realization of this fundamental theme of Vedānta. For example, the *upāsana* on ‘Om’ should be done by considering Om as a *pratīka*, symbol, of Brahman, and not merely as a word.

*Prayojana*, the purpose of the study: Always remember the purpose behind every practice and the study of scriptures. The study of scriptures is not meant for name, or for attracting devotees, or to become a great scholar and being so honoured. It is for the realization of the ideal. Therefore, study the scriptures after fulfilling all these conditions.

(To be continued)

(Continued from page 242)

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14. Amado Nervo, ‘Yo no soy demasiado sabio ...’, *Serenidad* [‘I Am Not too Wise ...’, *Serenity*].
15. A Cynic is a member of an ancient Greek sect that advocated ‘natural’ life.
16. Amado Nervo, ‘Renunciación’, *Serenidad* [‘Renunciation’, *Serenity*].
17. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 290.225–9.
18. Amado Nervo, ‘Deidad’, *El estanque de los lotos*, [‘Deity’, *The Pond of Lotuses*].
19. Ibid., ‘Uno con Él’ [‘One with Him’].
20. Ibid., ‘Identidad’ [‘Identity’]. Amado gives, between brackets, this interpretation of *tat-tvam-asi*: ‘You are this: that is, you are one with and the same as all around you; you are the thing-in-itself’.
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# Mahendranath Gupta: The Morton Institution and Naimisharanya

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

**A**BOUT EDUCATION, Socrates said: ‘They who provide much wealth for their children, but neglect to improve them in virtue, do like those who feed their horses high, but never train them to the manage.’ M advocated a curriculum that emphasizes human values. He said: ‘Is the aim of education only to earn money? Look, how good education helps to develop noble qualities. It enhances (i) patience, (ii) perseverance, (iii) accuracy or carefulness, (iv) attention or focus, (v) concentration, (vi) sense of responsibility, (vii) breadth of vision, (viii) perception or clear understanding, and (ix) application or skill in action.’<sup>13</sup>

M managed the Morton Institution for twenty-seven years, trying out his ideas of education on his students with wonderful results. This school earned an excellent reputation in Calcutta, and M himself commanded love and respect from his teachers and students through his magnanimous personality, his integrity, and his deep spirituality. By nature he was very softhearted. Once a neighbour’s son shot a bird, which fell on the roof of the Morton Institution. He immediately put the bird in a cage, applied medicine to its wound, and fed it. After a few days of this treatment the bird improved. However, when the cage door was opened it tried to fly but fell into a drain. M again began to nurse the bird but, unfortunately, could not save its life.

M was also extremely patriotic. He was fully convinced that India would some day win her freedom. Although he never played an active role in politics or in India’s freedom movement, he inspired his



Naimisharanya in Uttar Pradesh

students to love and serve the motherland, which he considered to be a spiritual country. He had deep respect for two national leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Chittaranjan Das. M said that although Mahatma Gandhi was involved in politics, his life was imbued with spirituality and fully dedicated to the service of the nation. Gandhi was a man of renunciation. Chittaranjan Das was a famous barrister who earned a huge amount of money—1.2 million rupees every year—but he gave up his profession to join the Indian freedom movement. M greatly appreciated his renunciation and dedication to the motherland. When Das died in 1924, M wrote in the circular book of the Morton Institution: ‘The school will remain closed for three days on account of the sad and untimely demise of the great patriot saint of Bengal’ (272).

## Naimisharanya in Calcutta

Naimisharanya is situated in the Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh, 100 kilometres from Lucknow.

Naimisharanya is the holy forest where Vedavyasa taught the Vedas and all the Puranas to his disciples. Later it is in this very holy place that Romaharshana (alternatively Lomaharshana), Vedavyasa’s disciple, narrated the Puranas to several rishis. It is also the blessed place where Ugrasrava (Suta Gosvami), the son of Romaharshana, narrated the story of Shrimad Bhagavatam to several rishis.

According to legend, in the Satya Yuga [golden age], the first of the four yugas [cycles], the rishis wanted to perform uninterrupted yajnas for the

benefit of mankind, and asked Lord Brahma for a suitable place. Lord Brahma created a huge wheel (called Manomaya Chakra), released it, and instructed the sages to follow it. He also told them that the place where it broke down would be very auspicious for doing penance. The sages followed the Manomaya Chakra, which after travelling for a long time fell down on a large segment of land and its circumference (Nemi) broke down as predicted by Lord Brahma. This segment of land became famous as Naimisharanya.

As soon as it was destroyed, from the spot a huge gush of water spurted up in the form of a Shiva-linga. As the water was flooding the place, the rishis prayed and Mother Shakti appeared and absorbed and stopped the flow of water. Hence Naimisharanya is also a Shakti-Pitha and has a famous ancient Lalita Devi temple.<sup>14</sup>

M recreated Naimisharanya on the roof of Thakur Bari, his family home, as well as on the roof of the Morton Institution. He lived both in Thakur Bari and in the attic room of his school. To create an atmosphere like that of a Vedic ashrama, he planted tulsi, plumeria, and other flowering plants in tubs on the roofs of both buildings. He also had his shrine on the roof of Thakur Bari that still exists. Here he wrote and published *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, volumes one, two, three, and four. He wrote volume five in 1932 at the Morton Institution.

The Vedic sages lived in the forest, where they taught the knowledge of Brahman to their disciples. These teachings are now known as the Upanishads. M was nostalgic for those ancient Vedic times in the forest, so he went to Rishikesh, Haridwar, and Mihijam to perform austerities, and then he created miniature forests on the roofs of his residences. Swami Nityatmananda wrote: 'It appeared that the soul of a great rishi lived in M. He had a tremendous longing to live in a hermitage throughout his life. For that reason, he planted various flowers and fruit trees in tubs on the roofs of both his Calcutta residences: Thakur Bari and the Morton Institution. When he recited the Upanishads in his deep voice, it seemed as if an ancient sage of the Satya Yuga had been born in a new

body. The Upanishads were his soul and the Gita was next to them. He was also an authority on the Bible. While talking with the devotees, he would quote from these three—Upanishads, Gita, and Bible—without interruption. The attic room and the adjacent roof of the Morton Institution was veritably Naimisharanya, and resounded continually with the words of God. M was like the great sage Narada, proclaiming the glory of Ramakrishna with a thousand mouths.'<sup>15</sup>

'In later years, people would say: "If you want to forget the world, go to see M. He knows how to remove worldly desires from the mind and instill the thought of God there." People flocked to him, and he would talk to them only about God. When they would say, "Please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna", he would quote the conversation between the disciple and the teacher in the *Kena Upanishad*: The disciple said, "Teach me the Upanishad", and the preceptor replied, "I have already told you the Upanishad." By this, M meant that as he knew only Sri Ramakrishna and nothing else, whatever came through his lips was about him.'<sup>16</sup>

Some rishis in ancient times were married; nonetheless, they practised severe austerities in the forest and lived on fruit or begged for their food like mendicants. Generally M lived in the school building while his family lived in Thakur Bari, a half mile away, and he used to walk there for his meals as if he were a mendicant begging for food from someone else's house. He was a light eater and his food was very simple: rice with ghee, milk, and fruit during the day, and bread with milk at night. He followed his guru's ideal of plain living and high thinking.

Swami Raghavananda wrote:

The abstemiousness and the extreme simplicity of his life struck his visitors forcibly. Although able to live more lavishly, he limited himself to the strictest frugality. In food and dress and external surroundings he was very simple. He would say that one of the great teachings of the Master was the simplification of life; otherwise the external incidents of life would increase, engross the mind and completely smother the spirit, leaving no time for

thinking about God. Thus living in simple, almost tattered garments, on food simple to bareness, in surroundings the most commonplace, he lived the life of absorption in God, and was an example of high thinking and plain living. His food was the simplest—only rice and milk. This he continued for many years and did not ask for any variation. He was truly 'devoid of Rasa'. He completely controlled the craving of the palate. Living this simple life and being merged in God, he was a blessing to innumerable souls and a hope and a stay to many a lost wanderer on this planet.<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately, we have some photographs of M that help us to visualize him. Swami Nityatmananda also described his appearance:

M had a well-built tall body and fair complexion. His forehead was prominent; chest, expanded; eyes, large and protruding and tinged with love; and arms, long enough to reach the knees. His long white beard overflowed on his chest, and his countenance was calm and deep in thought. He was a handsome, humorous, and sweet-speaking person. Being absorbed in the thought of Ramakrishna, it was as if this great yogi had been born to glorify the Master day and night. Although he was a great soul and a man of wisdom, he was an embodiment of humility. He was god-intoxicated and free from desires and doubts. He was truly a great rishi.<sup>18</sup>

In 1923, when M was sixty-nine years old, Swami Chidbhavananda met him on the roof of the Morton Institution. He left this account:

'Advanced as he was now in age, it was but natural that he should retire from the teaching work and take to spiritual pursuit exclusively. His dutiful sons had now taken up the responsibility of running the school. ... Master Mahashaya, whom I was seeing for the first time, looked like a patriarch of yore. He was neither tall nor short—a middle-sized venerable person he was. Calmness and serenity were the distinguished features of his face. The bald head bespoke of his advanced age. The beard added to his venerable appearance. The prominent and lotus-like eyes sparkled with spiritual luminos-

ity. The lips indicated the ethical chiselling they had undergone. ...

'He utilized all his learning for the service of his Lord, Sri Ramakrishna Deva. His body, property and life were all completely at the disposal of Sri Guru Maharaj [Ramakrishna]. His delight, sustenance, and purpose in life was [*sic*] the presentation of the godly career of his Lord to the daily thronging devotees. Soon after the preliminary talk, he would switch to his favourite theme—the Master's earthly *leela* in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. Man delights in recounting his favourite in life. The invaluable treasure in the life of Master Mahashaya was his own Master, the Paramahansa Deva. He was at his best when he was giving a verbal presentation of his Master. Blessed are they who got the opportunity of listening to such talks. The narrator, the listeners and the topic chosen got coalesced for the time being. This divine gift in Master Mahashaya was a boon to mankind as long as he was in his mortal coil. In the presence of assembled devotees he would recapitulate his holy contact with the Godman of Dakshineswar. Then it would transform itself into verbal expression. By this act he mentally took the devotees to the realm of joy. What was not physically possible due to the barrier of time was more than compensated by the mental union. Day after day this good shepherd escorted the religiously inclined ones to the presence of his chosen ideal. The presence of the Paramahansa would be tangibly experienced by the listeners. They would feel themselves personally presented to the God-absorbed superman. Time and space are no barriers for one enlightened soul introducing the other ardent one to his intimately known Godman. This rare cosmic function Master Mahashaya was very efficiently discharging all through his earthly career. ...

'Evenings, between five and seven, was the time when devotees would resort to the residence of Master Mahashaya for spiritual repast. One evening the parlour was full with devotees to its maximum capacity. They were all inclined more to silence than to gossip. At five sharp the apostle emerged from his room. With eagerness looming large on

the faces, the assembled people stood up to greet the holy man. The formal exchange of greetings was over. The day's topic was not always decided in advance. As chance and circumstances would impel, the theme would develop of its own accord. "The grace of God" was the topic that emerged from the mouth of the holy man on that day. He spoke of it very eloquently because of his own experience: "The sun and the rain are the sources of life on earth. Even so the grace of God is no less a life giving factor to the devotee. But for it life would be dreary on earth. The breeze of the grace of God is eternally blowing. The devotee is only to avail himself of it. After tasting the mercy of the Lord the devotee becomes completely changed. Earthly tribulation is no bar to his career on earth. The more he meets obstacles, the more his devotion increases. Grace is to the devotee what air is to the worldly man. Life becomes unbearable to him if he forgets the grace of his Maker." ...

'Womenfolk had free access to the Master Mahashaya in the manner in which the daughters approach their fathers for the solution of their domestic problems. The Master [Mahashaya] was always kind to them and spared no pains in attending to their problems. The gravity of a problem was more subjective than objective. The Master Mahashaya knew it, but his complete identification with the person helped mitigate the poignancy of the problem. Invariably he would take up the attitude of the father. A young woman in tears once presented her family complication. She put it to the holy man that her mother-in-law was always harsh to her and the husband paid no heed to this. This was her serious handicap. The Master Mahashaya sympathized with her and asked her to accept the order from her mother-in-law as a mandate from the Maker Himself. Once that attitude was assumed all her difficulties would vanish as trifles. Young age was the time to practise fortitude. This world is a training ground. The Cosmic Mother Kali is assuming millions of forms and shaping the careers of beings in tune with their disposition. She is both kind and stern alternately. As the mother of this young woman, She was

kind. But as her mother-in-law She was stern, which is absolutely necessary. All commands that came from her were to be taken as orders from Mother Kali. By implicitly obeying the mother-in-law, the woman was building her character. Such an attitude would change her distress into discipline. Earnestness would take the place of weariness and disgust. This revelation from the Master Mahashaya opened her eyes. She turned a new chapter in life. Henceforth she had no problems. ...

'A young widow came to him dazed with her problems. Death had suddenly snatched away her loving husband. The woman had no issue. The relatives of her husband were all callous about her future. On her parental side also there was hardly any who could help her. The means at her disposal were meagre. She thought of suicide, but did not have the courage to resort to it. Life was gloomy. In that sad plight she approached the Master Mahashaya staggering and afflicted. The sage, however, received her calmly and with all love and affection. And that was the first ray of hope and consolation for the forlorn young widow.

'[Master Mahashaya said]: "The apparent blow is an act of mercy come to you from God. A few years back you did not know anything about your departed husband. You were an utter stranger to him. A social usage brought you in contact with him. Providence has now kindly broken your bonds with him. There are other ways of making life more useful. The husband-and-wife life is good in its own way. But God has in his mercy provided a woman with innumerable other avenues, more useful and greater in purpose. Daughter, sorrow not. Please listen to the message of hope and benediction come to all of us from the Paramahansa Deva of Dakshineswar. A chartered libertine who became a staunch disciple of the Master put it to him this wise:

"*The Query*: If you happen to be enmeshed in an earthly career but have the freedom to choose a life to your liking within bounds, what sort of life would you like to have?

"*Answer*: I would choose to be a young widow.

"*Query*: Why so?

“*Answer:* All earthly obligations are over for an issueless widow. She can therefore chalk out a career of her choice. A cottage in a village, a bit of land adjoining it, and a cow are sufficient to provide her with earthly needs. She can then remain heart and soul immersed in Godly pursuits. She can forget all her worldly concerns. She can create a divine world of her own. That would be a blessing to herself and to the world. There is nothing happier than this in this world of impermanence and uncertainty.

“Daughter, ponder over this message of the Great Master. It seems he has given this benediction to you in particular. Dependence upon human beings is always uncertain. Whereas dependence on God and his grace is everlasting.”

‘This analysis by the aged sage opened a new vista on human life in the mind of the erstwhile depressed and forlorn young widow. She acted on the advice of the Master Mahashaya and carved a new chapter in her life. There have been many such stranded souls who were put on the right path by this noble and enlightened Master.’<sup>19</sup>

Swami Raghavananda left a vivid description of M’s Naimisharanya:

In the sweet and warm months of April and May, sitting under the canopy of heaven on the roof-garden at 50 Amherst Street, surrounded by shrubs and plants, himself sitting in their midst like a rishi of old, the stars and planets in their courses beckoning us to things infinite and sublime, he would speak to us of the mystery of God and his love, and of the yearning that would rise in the human heart to solve the Eternal Riddle, as exemplified in the life of his Master. The mind melting under the influence of his soft sweet words of light would almost transcend the limits of finite existence and dare to peep into the Infinite. He himself would take in the influence of the setting and say, ‘What a blessed privilege it is to sit in such a setting (pointing to the starry heavens), in the company of devotees discoursing on God and his love.’ Those unforgettable scenes will long remain imprinted on the minds of his hearers.<sup>20</sup>

Bees fly from flower to flower to gather nectar and create honey from it. People then extract

the honey from the honeycomb and enjoy it. M used to visit the temple garden of Dakshineswar as well as places in Calcutta to gather Ramakrishna-honey, the Master’s immortal words. He gathered Ramakrishna-honey over a period of five years, recorded it in the *Gospel*, and dispensed it himself for nearly fifty years. He strongly believed that anyone who imbibes these immortal words of the Master will become immortal.

Holy company is like a ferry boat that helps people cross the turbulent ocean of maya. M lauded holy company in many ways. For instance, he said: ‘Holy company is the panacea, the remedy for all worldly diseases. It is like an oasis in the desert. As thirsty travellers in the desert rush to the oasis and save their lives by drinking water, so being tormented with worldly sufferings, human beings take refuge in holy company. ... One can achieve a new life by keeping company with the holy; otherwise one cannot fathom the spiritual world. If one can hold on strictly to the association with the holy, all favourable things of spiritual life come automatically. It is like the mother cow who comes spontaneously to a person who holds her calf. ... Lust or animal passion diminishes spontaneously through the company of the holy. And again, it enhances longing for God. ... We have no alternative than to have the company of the holy. “Have the company of the holy”—that was the beginning, middle, and end of the Master’s advice to us. ... Not only did the Master ask us to have the company of the holy, he also created some wonderful sadhus. The monks of Belur Math are the greatest sadhus in this age, because their ideal is Sri Ramakrishna.’<sup>21</sup>


M always encouraged devotees to visit Belur Math and enjoy the company of holy monks there. He himself realized the value of holy company by associating with Ramakrishna from 1882 to 1886; and from then until his death in 1932 he was always surrounded by monks and devotees. As the ancient sages talked only about God and His glory in Naimisharanya, M did the same thing in his rooftop gardens in Calcutta.

Swami Raghavananda recalled: ‘His great love

for sadhus and bhaktas was phenomenal. He would idealize sadhus and their lives above all and could not bear to class them in the same category with householders. Sadhus—those who are trying to devote their whole time and energies to God, without giving their energies to anything else—he would consider the *beau ideal* of life. If the realization of God is the end of life, then that realization is possible only to those who give their all to God—who, leaving all other preoccupations, with single-minded devotion wait upon God for a spark of the Divine Fire which will set their hearts aflame with Divine Love. Householders, even if they are bhaktas, have a thousand distractions, a hundred necessary set-backs, which put a limit to their allegiance to God. They cannot be compared with those who have set their whole mind and face towards Him—that is what he would say. He would say again that all the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna tended towards sannyas, even in his teachings to grihasthas, he sowed the seeds which will ultimately sprout up in the form of sannyas either in this life or another. According to him without bahih-sannyas [outer-renunciation], antah-sannyas [inner-renunciation] was not possible and without antah-sannyas realization of God was impossible. Thus he would idealize sadhus—whole-time men, as he would call them—and set them apart in a category by itself and would resent the least slight shown to them or their life and would always preach the glory of sadhu-sanga [holy company]—the only practical means of spiritual realization. When a sadhu would come, he would sit near him for hours, forgetting everything and say—“A sadhu has come. The Lord Himself has come in one form as it were, and shall I not postpone my eating and bath for him? Absurdity can go no further if I cannot do that.” He would love to feed the sadhus and sit by them and watch and say, “I am offering food to Thakur [the Master]; I am partaking in and seeing a Puja.” He would paint in brilliant colours the life of the sadhu, his great ideal and mission of life, his great sacrifice for the highest end, and would show infinite regret if any sannyasin neglected his rare opportunity of realiz-

ing the *summum bonum* of life. Sadhus learnt from him the glory of their mission.<sup>22</sup>

In the divine drama of Ramakrishna, M played two important roles: He acted in the role of the sage Vyasa by recording the modern Bhagavata—the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—and he performed the part of the sage Narada, who always sang the glory of God. Swami Shivananda said: ‘M is a great soul. He is Vedavyasa in the Ramakrishna Incarnation.’<sup>23</sup> He was born to spread his Master’s mission. Ramakrishna told M that the Divine Mother had told him M would have to do a little work for Her: ‘God binds the *Bhāgavata* pundit to the world with one tie; otherwise, who would remain to explain the sacred book? He keeps the pundit bound for the good of men. That is why the Divine Mother has kept you in the world.’<sup>24</sup>

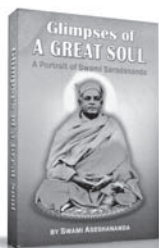
M accepted his guru’s assignment and fulfilled it with his heart and soul. Sitting in his Calcutta Naimisharanya, he recorded the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and taught its message to monks and devotees for nearly half a century.<sup>25</sup> The whole of humanity is indebted to this humble householder and wise rishi, whose whole being was saturated with Ramakrishna-consciousness. 

## References

13. *Srimar Jivan Darshan*, 295.
14. See < <http://www.astrojyoti.com/naimisharanya.htm> > accessed 14 December 2009.
15. *Srima Darshan*, 1.xxxii–iii.
16. See Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived with God* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 210.
17. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 37/10 (Oct. 1932), 500.
18. *Srima Darshan*, 1.4–5.
19. *Kathamrita Centenary Memorial*, 207–18.
20. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 37/10 (Oct. 1932), 497.
21. *Srimar Jivan Darshan*, 156–7.
22. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 37/10 (Oct. 1932), 498–9.
23. *Srimar Jivan Darshan*, 415.
24. *Gospel*, 718–19.
25. Some of his conversations are recorded in Bengali by Swami Jagannathananda in two volumes, *Srima Katha*, and by Swami Nityatmananda in sixteen volumes, *Srima Darshan*. *Srima Samipe*, compiled and edited by Swami Chetanananda, has selections from available reminiscences in one volume.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## ***Glimpses of a Great Soul: A Portrait of Swami Saradananda*** Swami Aseshananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai  
600 004. E-mail: [srkmath@vsnl.com](mailto:srkmath@vsnl.com).  
2008. xvi + 335 pp. Rs 100.

As a 'portrait of Swami Saradananda' this outstanding book goes far beyond mere glimpses, revealing several dimensions of one of Sri Ramakrishna's illustrious disciples. Swami Saradananda having been the private secretary and 'bodyguard' of his guru, his perceptive observations are all the more valuable.

The first nine chapters of the book are devoted to the biography of the great swami, while the remaining graphically present his sterling qualities and his infinite capacity for work that bordered on the supernatural. Swami Aseshananda has collected a fund of material from the writings, dialogues, and spiritual talks of Swami Saradananda including a moving account of his memories of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. The devotion with which he served the Holy Mother, protecting her in the manner of the legendary Vasuki, is unparalleled.

Great men and women convey lessons in various ways; one learns not only from the way they handle complex situations, but even from the person's 'greatness in little things'. Swami Saradananda belonged to the Order's first generation of monks, possessing immense spiritual strength and the ability to mould characters and motivate disciples. With a benign outlook he used the carrot and stick as situations demanded. When the author was denied a job in Udbodhan, the guru displayed his sense of humour in prompting him to assert his right to the job. The author points out how divine help wards off imminent dangers in life when duties are discharged in a spirit of selfless service.

Today's management gurus will find it hard to believe that Swami Saradananda, sitting unnoticed in a small room with no gadgets, handled multiple functions each of which was demanding in its own

right. His bearing and commitment put him in command. It was no easy task to manage a fast-growing Order that extended beyond India, despite a hostile government and its 'sympathies' for a national movement for the country's freedom. Swami Vivekananda knew that Swami Saradananda alone was capable of handling this gigantic task. The latter maintained the identity of the Order and established its credentials at every stage of its development.

This great swami's life, in addition, offers lessons in leading an ideal life—whether domestic or spiritual—on rules of diet, in bringing up children, and last but not least, in the love of God. A sum of one hundred rupees is a small price to pay for a book of such immense value.

P S Sundaram  
Chennai



## ***Hinduism and Buddhism in Perspective***

Y V Dahiya

Munshiram Manoharlal PB 5715, 54  
Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.  
[www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com). 2008. xii + 257 pp.  
Rs 595.

In the field of comparative religion there are quite a few authentic studies on Hinduism and Buddhism by scholars like Charles Eliot, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and K N Upadhyaya. The book under review is a comparative study of the *Sutta Pitaka* and the *Bhagavadgita*. Besides the introductory and concluding essays there are five chapters providing a lucid exposition of Hindu and early Buddhist concepts of ethics and morality, action and rebirth, Self and non-self, metaphysics, and God and salvation. In each chapter there is an overall evaluation of the similarities and differences between these concepts as conceived of in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Both the *Sutta Pitaka* and the *Gita* were compiled about the same time—5th to 2nd century BCE—and serve as practical handbooks of applied philosophy of life, based on their respective empirical and

traditional metaphysical assumptions. Buddhism and the Gita agree that all good and evil actions accrue corresponding fruits. In the Buddhist framework of morality the Noble Eightfold Path is the only righteous path, in contrast to the Gita which expounds that divinely ordained natural duties are the righteous duties. Differing from the rigid Buddhist standard of morality, the Gita justifies even morally defective actions in the name of one's 'social duty', *svadharma*, while condoning the sinful acts of a devotee of God. Concerning action and rebirth, both agree that all desire-oriented actions produce their corresponding consequences in the unending cycle of rebirth. The law of *pratityasamutpada*, which operates without any supernatural interference, is the root of the whole cycle of rebirth in different spheres of existence. The Buddhist and Hindu doctrines of karma are distinguished as the former holds that it is only an 'autonomous karmic law', while the latter maintains that it is a 'karmic law controlled by God' and the emergence, sustenance, and destruction of the universe are carried out in accordance with it. The doctrine of *anatta* refutes the Gita's notion of the Atman both within any of the five aggregates and outside them. Both philosophies agree that karma produced from ignorance and desire is the sole controlling factor of rebirth. Refuting the Buddhist viewpoint that the Self is not a substance but only an unsubstantial stream of consciousness which unceasingly changes through life to life, the Gita holds that the Atman, which is a fraction of God, transmigrates from one body to another.

Interlinking virtue, wisdom, and salvation, both philosophical systems stress on the inner purity of mind as the root of righteousness and maintain that cessation of suffering as the practical means of salvation can be attained in this life and beyond. Buddhism specifically advocates the middle way and the Noble Eightfold Path, and Gita emphasizes knowledge, devotion, and unmotivated action as the triple means of salvation. Despite their respective negative and positive descriptions of nirvana, the Buddhist conception is predominantly 'negative', while that of the Gita is predominantly 'positive'.

This volume is appended with a comprehensive bibliography comprising Pali texts, translations of the *Sutta Pitaka*, and modern works on the Gita. Barring stray printing errors and a missing footnote, Prof. Dahiya's excellent comparative study highlighting, analysing, and evaluating the doctrines of early Buddhism and the Gita enriches our understanding

of Indology as well as of comparative religion. Perhaps, the book should have been more aptly titled 'A Comparative Study of the *Sutta Pitaka* and the Bhagavadgita'.

Prof. V V S Saibaba

Former Professor, Department of Philosophy  
and Religious Studies  
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam



## Jesus

David Edmunds

Indus Source Books, PO Box 6194, Malabar Hill PO, Mumbai 400 006. E-mail: [info@indussource.com](mailto:info@indussource.com). 2009. xxx + 181 pp. Rs 195.

The scene is Gethsemane, an unfrequented garden on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. With only a few precious hours remaining before his destined arrest, Jesus has brought his three closest disciples to this favoured spot in order that they might pray together. Readers join him in this lonely setting and listen in whilst he reflects on his life and mission and ponders their significance. David Edmunds chooses to narrate Jesus's story through the prophet's own mouth, and this first-person narrative weaves a compassionate interpretation of the Gospel around well over a hundred snippets of Biblical text—taken mainly from the synoptic gospels—served up in sixty easily digestible segments. Edmunds's Jesus comes across more as the Son of Man than the Son of God—tallying with the personal persuasion of St Thomas, whose church in India is professed to be older than even that of Rome and about whom the author speaks in his epilogue.

Acknowledging the inevitable differences amongst Christians regarding Biblical interpretations—that sprout from having a billion and a half followers—Edmunds admits his views are 'slightly out of step with much of Christian tradition'. There is nothing within its pages that shouts controversy, however, and in leaving aside any trace of dogmatism he makes his book welcoming to followers of all faiths. The introduction, epilogue, and separate note regarding the relationship between the three 'major' Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—give the main narration its context, and as a complete package Edmunds's book offers a highly readable, universally accessible, and refreshingly innovative portrayal of this inimitable life.

Br Mark  
Somerset

# REPORTS

## **Parliament of Religions at Melbourne**

From 3 to 9 December 2009 a Parliament of Religions was organized at Melbourne, with the theme: 'Make a world of difference: hearing each other, healing the earth'. Several monks of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, together with nearly 5,500 delegates from 80 countries representing more than 200 religious groups, participated in the event, which had about 640 sessions comprising talks, group discussions, dialogues, yoga, meditation, worship sessions, art appreciation, dances, music, and a variety of performances.

## **News from Branch Centres**

Sri Dorjee Khandu, Chief Minister, Arunachal Pradesh, inaugurated the MRI unit and two-bed haemo-dialysis unit at **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar**, on 6 December.

**Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor**, inaugurated a new bookstall at Yeshwantpur Railway Station, Bengaluru, on 8 December.

Srimat Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math, Ghatshila**, on 16 December.

Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, unveiled the eleven-foot bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda at **Ramakrishna Math, Madurai**, on 22 December.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for a proposed building complex comprising a school of Indian heritage, a school of mathematical sciences, and a central-library-cum-computer-centre at the Belur Math main campus of **Ramakrishna Vivekananda University, Belur**, on 30 December.

On 31 December **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, launched a mobile bookstall which will carry the message of the Order through publications all over Tamil Nadu, especially to educational institutions.

The National Youth Day, 12 January 2010, was celebrated in many centres with various programmes, such as processions, speeches, recitations, cultural competitions, and other events. **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, organized a procession, a public meeting, and an all-India drawing competition on the theme 'Draw Swamiji—Draw Energy' in which about 30,500 youths participated. **Ramakrishna Math, Madurai**, conducted a public meeting and an essay competition on Swami Vivekananda in which 22,712 students from 296 educational institutions in Tamil Nadu participated.

## **Achievements**

Two students of the Department of Sanskrit Studies, **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, won the following prizes in the Akhila Bharata Shastriya Samskrita Bhashana Spardha (47th All-India Sanskrit Elocution Contest) conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan at their Jaipur, campus from 30 November to 2 December 2009: Vivek Karmakar, gold medal in Elocution (Vedanta) and silver medal in Samasya-purti



*Srimat Swami Smarananandaji unveiling the bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda at Madurai*

(completing the shlokas); Bimal Rakshit—bronze medal in Elocution (Vyakarana).

R A Srisagar, a class-10 student of **Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore**, bagged the third prize in the drawing competition at the National Children's Meet organized by National Bal Bhavan, New Delhi, in November.

Alok Warda and Balaram Dodi, class-10 and class-12 students of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**, secured first ranks in the respective state merit lists for primitive tribe group in the secondary and higher secondary examinations conducted by the Chhattisgarh Board of Secondary Education in 2009.

In the all-India drawing competition conducted by Chennai Math on 12 January 2010, three students of the school at **Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Viveknagar**, won prizes: Debajyoti Sen-gupta and Ranamay Saha the second prize, and Kaustuv Roychoudhuri the third prize. Besides, in the all-India drawing and handwriting contest 2009-10 conducted by Akhil Bharatiya Nagrik Vikas Kendra (All India Citizens Development Centre), Aurangabad, six students of the school won the Kalaratna Award: Swapnil Sen, Soumyadeep Nandi, Shubharaj Pal, Rohan Chakraborty, Soumyaroop Nath, and Kaustuv Roychoudhuri; the principal Swami Purnatmananda and the organizer teacher Gopikananda Chattopadhyay won the best principal and teacher award, and the school the best school award.

Chiranjib Majumdar, a student of Draughtsman (Mechanical) course of **Ramakrishna Mission, Shilpavidyalaya, Belur**, stood first in the 45th state skill competition and third in the 45th all-India skill competition held at Kolkata and Mumbai respectively.

## Relief

**Flood Relief** • On 10 and 11 January **Hyderabad** centre distributed 160 looms to needy weavers of Rajoli village in Mehaboobnagar district who had lost their looms in a recent flood.

**Fire Relief** • On 13 and 14 January **Baghbazar**

centre distributed 468 saris, 468 lungis, 977 chadars, and 977 sweaters to families whose houses had been gutted by a devastating fire at Vasanti Colony, a slum in Ultadanga, North Kolkata.

**Cyclone Aila Relief** • **Belgharia** centre distributed 10,345 saris, 10,333 dhotis, 12,721 blankets, 13,300 woollen jackets, 3,090 solar lanterns, 3,100 mosquito nets, and 3,000 sets of utensils (each set containing 5 plates, 5 glasses, 5 spoons, 2 bowls, and 1 ladle) to 6,829 affected families in Gosaba block, South 24-Parganas district, on 17 and 24 January 2010.

**Winter Relief** • 18,716 blankets were distributed to people affected by the severity of winter through the following centres: **Agartala**: 200; **Antpur**: 500; **Baghbazar**: 738; **Barasat**: 600; **Bhubaneswar**: 100; **Garbeta**: 35; **Guwahati**: 217; **Ichapur**: 2,311; **Jamtara**: 549; **Katihar**: 100; **Khetri**: 61; **Medinipur**: 400; **Patna**: 8,500; **Puri Math**: 1,400; **Rahara**: 505; **Raipur**: 500; **Silchar**: 1,000; **Tamluk**: 1,000. Besides, the following centres distributed various winter garments to the needy: **Garbeta**: 50 sweaters; **Ichapur**: 100 woollen jackets; **Patna**: 498 woollen jackets and 2,145 assorted woollen garments.

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to the needy. **Agartala**: 1,600 sets of children's garments; **Baghbazar**: 1,000 saris; **Guwahati**: 100 saris and 170 steel plates; **Ichapur**: 2,095 saris and 87 assorted garments; **Medinipur**: 75 saris and 25 dhotis; **Porbandar**: 3,925 kg rice, 1,200 kg dal, 800 kg oil, 425 packets of biscuits, and 400 chadars; **Puri Math**: 100 packets of baby food, 50 sets of school uniforms, 27 slates, 75 dictionaries, 100 soap bars, 100 Dettol bottles, 100 nail-clippers, and other items; **Rahara**: 33 kg coconut oil, 45 saris, 12 assorted garments, and 147 mosquito nets; **Raipur**: 100 saris; **Silchar**: 366 saris and 270 dhotis; **Vadodara**: 240 kg flour, 96 kg rice, 48 kg edible oil, 36 kg spices, 12 kg salt, 96 plates, 96 bowls, 96 glasses, 48 frying pans, 48 frying spoons, 96 blankets, 130 school bags, 780 notebooks, and 130 geometry boxes.

**Pilgrim Service** • As in the previous years **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata**, organized a round-the-clock medical relief camp during Makar Sankranti Mela at Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas district from 10 to 16 January. In all, 5,781 patients were treated, out of which 18 received indoor medical care. Besides, 150 blankets and 189 pieces of clothing were distributed to poor pilgrims and monks. **Manasadwip** centre arranged board and lodging facilities for 1,500 pilgrims at residential camps in the mela area and provided medical care to 60 of them. 